

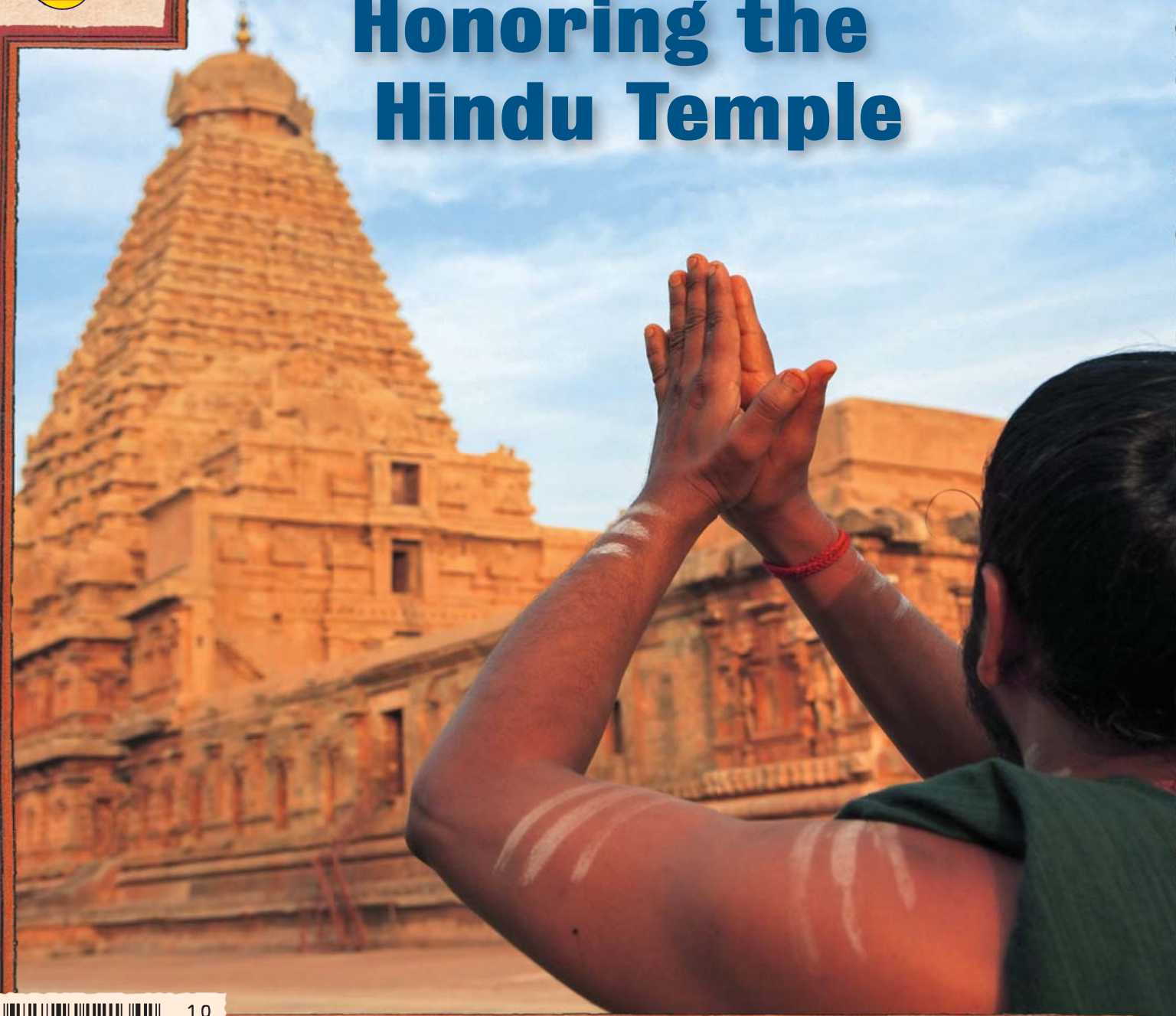
# HINDUISM TODAY

Affirming Sanatana Dharma and Recording the Modern History of a Billion-Strong Global Religion in Renaissance



SPECIAL EDITION

## Honoring the Hindu Temple



CHEN WEI SENG/SHUTTERSTOCK



COVER: A priest salutes the Brihadeeswara Temple in Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu, India; (above) Kerala's traditional mural art is alive and well in this 2011 painting of Siva blessing devotees on the banks of a sacred river.

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER/DECEMBER, 2012 • HINDU YEAR 5114  
NANDANA, THE YEAR OF HAPPINESS

*Bodhinatha Veylanswami* [www.gurudeva.org](http://www.gurudeva.org)

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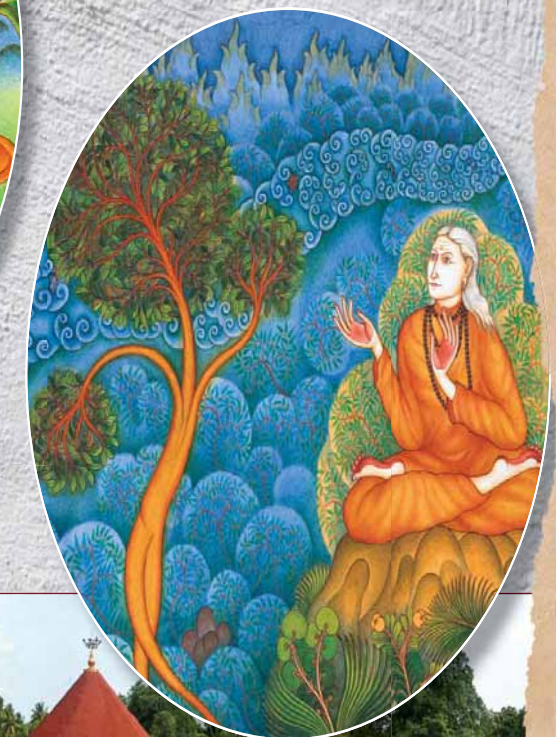
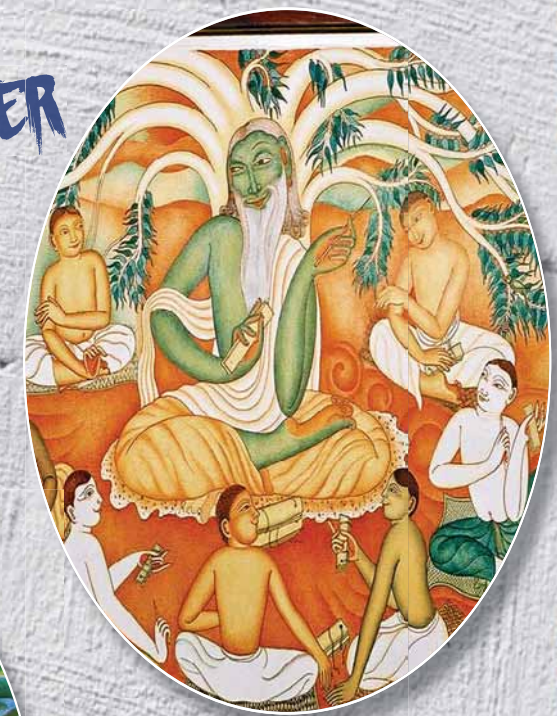
PHOTO BY DAS MENON/DINODIA

(above) This aging Siva Pradosha Nritham, a dancing Siva regarded as one of India's historic masterpieces, adorns the plaster walls at Ettumanoor Mahadeva Temple in central Kerala. (below, right) The Vaikom Mahaveer Sivan temple with its circular

sanctum boasts some of Kerala's finest murals. (circles, clockwise from left) Suresh Muthukulam takes contemporary subjects and executes them in the old style: farmer's toils, teacher with students, guava tree gives mystical message to Gurudeva.

# PAINT ON PLASTER

Kerala's mural tradition, once nearly extinct, gets a makeover... page 62



DAS MENON/DINODIA

CIRCLE PHOTOS COURTESY OF SURESH MUTHUKULAM



# GLOBAL DHARMA

RUSSIA

## Swami Touches Russian Souls, Planting Virasaiva Seeds

IN LATE MAY AND EARLY JUNE, 2012, Shri 1008 Kashi Jagadguru Chandrashekhara Shivacharya Mahaswamiji, head of the Virasaiva Jangamvadi Math in Varanasi, made his second visit to Russia. He stayed at the country house of one of his devotees, performing daily puja and giving darshan.

On June 2-3 he conducted a public workshop at the Ashtanga Yoga Center, organized and promoted by his disciple Dinesh Zaenchkovsky. Among the events, he presented the famed Saiva text *Shri Siddhanta Shikhamani*, which has been translated into Russian by his

disciple Ms. Gauri Kravchenko. The public program included Siva *abhisheka* puja, followed by initiations. He gave diksha to twelve disciples, and fifteen students received a personal mantra. The program concluded with kirtan in praise of Lord Siva.

When asked about the future of Hinduism in Russia, Swami said: "From my point of view, Hinduism will not become mainstream in Russia. It will gradually spread due to the people doing their sadhana—in other words, due to the yogis who are now getting their diksha, performing their daily puja or to others who are doing their



Born in Karnataka and a follower of Lingayat Virasaivism, Swami Chandrashekhara invokes Lord Siva in Moscow through puja to the *Ishtalingam* that is normally kept in a locket worn around the neck.

USA

## USC Plans Hindu Studies Chair, the First in America

THE DHARMA CIVILIZATION Foundation is making a \$3.24 million gift to the University of Southern California's School of Religion to set up the Swami Vivekananda Visiting Faculty in Hindu Studies and eventually the Dharma Civilization Foundation Chair in Hindu Studies. Duncan Williams, Chair of the School of Religion and ordained Buddhist priest, explained, "This

gift highlights the department's commitment to study the enduring questions of human life and values."

Foundation trustee, professor Shiva Bajpai told HINDUISM TODAY, "Our agreement with USC is unique in that we have established criteria for the choice of faculty to ensure that this chair does not become an ivory tower retirement position. The faculty

must have a vision which goes beyond dry anthropology and includes the philosophy and theologies of dharmic faiths. They should actively develop the department, be a scholar/practitioner of dharmic religion and keep the chair relevant through engagement with living faith communities. It will be the first of its kind in US academia."



On June 23, 2012, a ceremony was held on the USC campus to officially sign the gift agreement. The new faculty, to be announced, will begin teaching in January, 2013.

**Lord Siva's emissary:** Swami Chandrashekhara at St. Basil's Cathedral in Moscow's famed Red Square, on his first visit to Russia, in 2010. Left: Dinesh Zaenchkovsky, one of Swami's first Russian disciples; Mahantalingaswami, rector of Veera Shaiva Math at Bangalore. Right: Gauri Kravchenko, another of Swami's early Russian disciples and translator of Saiva works into Russian.

spiritual practices. Each of these sadhakas will lay the foundation of Hinduism in Russia."

Now the world has twelve more Lingayats, twelve walking temples of Lord Shiva in Russia.

It is a small but potent new development for one of Hinduism's ancient traditions.

BY DINANATHA BODHISWAMI  
AND KSENIA BAKHTINA



AFRICA

## Tallest Hanuman in Africa

IN A BELATED REPORT WE HAVE learned that the tallest Lord Hanuman statue in the Africa was unveiled in January, 2011, at the Shri Vishnu Temple Society in Chatsworth, Durban.

The gigantic US\$160,000 monument, over 42 feet tall, is the temple's contribution to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the arrival of

indentured Indians in South Africa. Lord Hanuman is known as the embodiment of strength, righteousness and devotion—a symbol of power and strength, not only for Hindus but for all Indians.

The intricately and colorfully designed concrete structure was created by Umash Harripersadh, a resident of Ottawa, Canada.



**The Hanuman Chalisa states:** "Victory, victory, victory to You, O Hanumanji, as our supreme Guru gives us grace."

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: COURTESY HINDU WOMEN'S NETWORK; COURTESY WWW.PRO-TECATHLETICS.COM; RUDIREN CARPANEN PILLAY



More than 300 women, of all ages, gathered to share information and uncover ways to deal with core issues facing Hindu women.

USA

## Hindu Ladies Tackle Issues

THE FIRST-EVER "HINDU Women's Network" conference, an initiative of Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America, was convened at New Dorp High School in Staten Island, New York, on June 24, 2012.

The director and main convener of the day-long conference was Dr. Ila Sukhadia, a local pediatrician. Her primary objective was to highlight the various challenges faced by women and create an interactive network to guide them in times of crisis. With this goal in mind, the well-attended conference was divided into ten different

sessions, headlining women's various needs as the nucleus of the family in USA. The subjects explored, in panels and with experts, were Family Relations, Self-Identity and Connecting with Your roots, Motivating Children, Caring for Aging Parents, Personal Loss and Loneliness, Marital and Conjugal Conflicts, Fitness and Health, Empowerment, Youth Sessions and Money Management.

The event so inspired the participants that the Hindu Women's Network is planning to convene more such forums throughout the USA.

FAMOUS VEGETARIANS

## Scott Jurek's *Eat to Run* Book Helps Mainstream Veganism

RECENTLY, ULTRAMARATHONS have become a highly publicized "extreme" sport. One veteran of the scene is Scott Jurek, a long-time vegan who has been running for 18 years. His longest race was 165.7 miles in 24 hours. His book, *Eat to Run*, is a wake-up call to those who believe animal protein is a necessity in a healthy diet. Recipes included.

A marathon is 26 miles, 385 yards (42.195km). Ultramarathons cover greater, body punishing distances. Scott has run with Mexico's Tamahumara Indians, for whom running is a lifestyle requirement. They eat little protein and are known to run 600 miles in mountainous terrain to deliver messages. See: [bit.ly/tarahum](http://bit.ly/tarahum).



**Running on plant fuel:** listen to Scott's story: [wny.cc/Krvqut](http://wny.cc/Krvqut)





**Free for all? Maybe yes, maybe no:** (above) A weekly free yoga class at Bryant Park in New York; (right) Bikram Yoga's 26-posture series. If you charge money to teach this series, you may get sued.

## YOGA

# No New Yoga Copyrights. Will Bikram Yoga Rights Hold Up?

IN JUNE, 2012, THE US PATENT office ruled that a sequence of yoga postures cannot be copyrighted. But they also decided not to revoke previous copyrights, which include Bikram Choudhury's famous 26-posture series done for 90 minutes in a heated room.

In 1994 Bikram started an accelerated teacher program. For \$4,000 you can go through an intense training and open a Bikram Yoga Studio. The method and has healed and changed the lives of thousands. Today there are over 330 US Bikram Yoga Studios. But things are not all light in



Bikram's world. One of his best students, Greg Gumucio, left and founded a new "Yoga to the People" chain of studios. Gumucio's program is an exact copy of Bikram's series in a heated room, billed as "traditional yoga." He is charging only \$8 a class versus the normal \$25 for a Bikram Yoga class; and teachers are not trained or certified by Bikram.

Bikram is suing him in Florida for copyright infringement. The US patent office ruling leaves the

matter in the hands of the courts.

The fight has divided the yoga world. Bikram's supporters believe followers must respect the lineage and teach the series only with Bikram certification and within the Bikram franchise. Otherwise this is no accountability and the tradition will inevitably be diluted. Others insist these postures were passed to the public domain centuries ago and are free for all to use.



**Getting a grip:** Soldiers find yoga reduces anxiety and anger

## MILITARY

# Military Uses Ancient Yoga Practice to Reduce Stress

FACED WITH THE HIGHEST suicide rates in 30 years, US military officials have turned to yoga to help treat psychologically wounded soldiers. The Walter Reed Health Department Clinical Center has

developed a three-week treatment program that includes hatha yoga and Yoga Nidra (labeled "Integrative Restoration, iRest") to assuage stress and PTSD. Ten states have implemented iRest programs.

## BRIEFLY...

**THE GOVERNMENT OF HIMACHAL Pradesh** is set to allow gold-rich temple trusts to melt tons of the precious metal in their coffers and turn it into mementos as is done at the Vaishno Devi shrine in Kashmir. Twenty-eight temples in the hill state hold an estimated \$18 million in gold and silver. "Fifty percent will be converted to coins and momentos. Of the remaining 50 percent, 10 percent is to be kept with the temple trust, 20 percent will be invested in gold bonds of the State Bank of India and the

remaining will be used to adorn the Deities," said an official.

**THAILAND AND CAMBODIA HAVE** pulled back their troops from the disputed border area around Preah Vihear, a ninth-century Hindu temple and World Heritage Site. This ends several years of a stand-off around the 900-year-old temple, during which it was badly damaged by military confrontations. The International Court of Justice will make a final ruling on ownership of the area next spring.

**MAHARASHTRA ICON MAKERS AND** pandal organizers are ignoring the state Forest and Environment Department's ban on plaster of paris images of Ganesha in preparation for this year's Ganesha Visarjana celebrations. They are charging half the cost in advance in case their statues are confiscated by authorities. They say that clay images may break during the festival, which would be considered an ill omen by the devotees.

**IN JULY, VARANASI** police recovered a

rare handwritten copy of *Ram-charit Manas*, the epic authored by Goswami Tulsidas. The manuscript had been stolen from the Hanuman Mandir at Tulsi Ghat in December, 2011. Other articles recovered at the same time included a statue and silver crown.

Global Dharma news provided by

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and lineages; 2. To inform and inspire Hindus worldwide and people interested in Hinduism; 3. To dispel myths, illusions and misinformation about Hinduism; 4. To protect, preserve and promote the sacred Vedas and the Hindu religion; 5. To nurture and monitor the ongoing spiritual Hindu renaissance; 6. To publish resources for Hindu leaders and educators who promote Sanatana Dharma. Join this seva by sending letters, clippings, photographs, reports on events and by encouraging others.



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## IN MY OPINION

# Hinduism in College Courses

## Misrepresentation and misguided emphasis plague the academic presentation of Hinduism

BY KIRTHI NARASIMHAN

AS A GROWING NUMBER of courses on Hinduism are showing up in universities across the US, professors should be mindful of their audience, making sure they are communicating the appropriate message to their students. And students, especially Hindus, should not be afraid to apply critical thinking, to analyze and respectfully question the knowledge being presented.

One class I took in college was called "Visions of the Divine Feminine." It focused on the Mahavidyas, the ten aspects of Devi, and gave a foundation in understanding Shaktism, the Hindu denomination that focuses on worship of the Divine Mother as the Supreme Being. Until I read the syllabus, I had not realized the importance that the female principle plays in Hinduism, and I looked forward to learning more.

The reason the course did not meet my expectations was not that the content was incorrect, but rather how the material was covered. My professor's teaching style and tone allowed for, even encouraged, misconceptions to arise. For example, on the first day, the topic of why some of the Goddess's forms are depicted as scantily clad, if not partially nude, was brought into question. Some students asked why the Goddesses are represented by voluptuous figurines and had such large breasts. Until that point, I had not even noticed these features; since childhood I had simply accepted that this is how they look. This question even piqued my curiosity. But the professor did not provide sufficient responses to the questions. He started by implying that these are representations of absolute femininity, but finished by comparing the iconography of the Goddesses to a picture of a skimpily dressed American adult film actress. I found this highly inappropriate.

A better explanation would have been that the icons are models of the essence of life: Large breasts symbolize ample milk to feed a child, and wide hips imply fertility. And



in India's climate, prior to the influence of Islamic and Western culture, wearing less clothing and not covering women's breasts was more practical.

The class also covered the topic of the Sivalingam. My professor did not adequately address the mystical significance and instead alluded to a more bawdy meaning. A more satisfactory presentation would

have stated that the Lingam represents the union of the male and female energies of this world from which all life begins, the beginning from which all existence emanates. Explained in this way, the Sivalingam actually reinforces my belief and faith in Sanatana Dharma. However, when erotic connotations without justification or clarification are left to the imagination of students, who simply do not know any better, misinterpretations of our Divinities, beliefs and way of life become more likely.

There was also a discussion on the four aims for existence as Hindus: dharma (righteousness), artha (prosperity), kama (pleasure) and moksha (liberation). Which aspect do you think the professor focused on? Although kama is an essential part of our lives, this topic has not been well elucidated in our upbringing. The course did not shed much light in this area either; the professor's discourse clouded my perception of sexuality, an essential part of our being, and licentious behavior, which is associated with other vices such as greed and pride. With better definition and demarcation, one can understand kama from the right perspective.

I applaud the growing number of universities that are making an effort to provide courses on Hinduism in their religious studies curriculum, but the sheer expanse of our faith requires careful instruction so that people do not go away from classes with wrong ideas.

KIRTHI NARASIMHAN, 26, plays the veena and works as a retail development manager at a Palo Alto, CA, electric car manufacturer





# Sinner or Divinity?

While some faiths view man as sinful by nature, Hinduism holds that our inmost self is the divine and taintless soul, or atma

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

IN TODAY'S WORLD OF GLOBAL COMMUNICATION, we encounter a multiplicity of views about the nature of man on a regular basis. At one extreme, each human being is inherently weak, imperfect, sinful and—without divine redemption—will remain helplessly so. At the other extreme, each human is inherently divine.

This is one of the themes I talked about with Hindus in the Caribbean in August of 2011. I was told in Trinidad last year that this message—"You are a sinner in need of redemption"—is being promoted strongly in an effort to convert Hindus. I am often asked, "What should we say when confronted with this argument by strong-willed evangelists? What is the Hindu view?" Let's explore three quotations from prominent swamis to define our perspective.

The first is from Swami Vivekananda's address to the World's Parliament of Religions in 1893, in the bold manner in which he affirmed truth as he saw it: "Being and becoming are different aspects of the same reality and are only relative to our intelligence. Man has the promise and potentiality of divine realization, of spiritual perfection, and therefore is God in the making; for even his humanity is intelligible only if regarded as an individualized self-expression of God. It is derogatory to human nature, therefore, to attribute sin to man. Besides, God being the sole and supreme Reality, how could a foreign element like sin invade the sanctuary of being? The Hindus refuse to call you sinners. Ye, divinities on earth, sinners? It is a sin to call man so! It is a standing libel on human nature."

Swami Chinmayananda, founder of Chinmaya Mission, explained: "Man is essentially divine. But

the divinity in him is veiled by the unbroken series of desires and thoughts arising in his bosom. A variety of these grades and concentration of these create the variety of human beings. To remove the encrustation of desires and thoughts, and unfold the divinity inherent in man, is the ultimate goal envisaged by the scriptures."

Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, my Gurudeva and founder of HINDUISM TODAY, gave a succinct description of our divine nature: "Deep inside we are perfect this very moment, and we have only to discover and live up to this perfection to be whole. We have taken birth in a physical body to grow and evolve into our divine potential. We are inwardly already one with God. Our religion contains the knowledge of how to realize this oneness and not create unwanted experiences along the way."



These opposite perspectives on man's nature—sinner and divinity—were candidly juxtaposed during a 2012 interfaith panel discussion in Midland, Texas, at which I represented Hinduism. The issue arose as clergy from five faiths responded to the question "In your faith, is humanity considered a one family?"

My answer was: "The Hindu belief that gives rise to tolerance of differences in race and nationality is that all of mankind is good; we are all divine beings, souls created by God. Hindus do not accept the concept that some individuals are evil and others are good. Hindus believe that each individual is a soul, a divine being, who is inherently good. Scriptures tell us that each soul is emanated from God, as a spark from a fire, beginning a spiritual journey which eventually leads back to God. All human beings are on this journey, whether they realize it or not."

The next speaker, Dr. Randel Everett of the Baptist Christian faith, put forth a distinctly different perspective. "The idea of the oneness of humanity—this is where Christianity would differ from some of the religions. We do believe in the oneness of humanity but that the oneness of humanity is that we are a fallen people. We do not believe that we are inherently good. We believe we are inherently selfish and self-centered, and that's why we need to be rescued or redeemed—that Christ rescues us from the domain of darkness."

Looking more closely at the Hindu belief that man is not inherently sinful—rather, the essence of man is divine and perfect—a further question arises: "What is the Hindu view of sin?" Gurudeva responds in *Dancing with Siva*: "Instead of seeing good and evil in the world, we understand the nature of the embodied

soul in three interrelated parts: instinctive or physical-emotional; intellectual or mental; and superconscious or spiritual.... When the outer, or lower, instinctive nature dominates, one is prone to anger, fear, greed, jealousy, hatred and backbiting. When the intellect is prominent, arrogance and analytical thinking preside. When the superconscious soul comes forth, the refined qualities are born—compassion, insight, modesty and the others. The animal instincts of the young soul are strong. The intellect, yet to be developed, is nonexistent to control these strong instinctive impulses. When the intellect is developed, the instinctive nature subsides. When the soul unfolds and overshadowed the well-developed intellect, this mental harness is loosened and removed."

This understanding of man's three-fold nature—instinctive, intel-



MIDLAND REPORTER-TELEGRAM

lectual and spiritual—explains why people act in ways that are clearly not divine, such as becoming angry and harming others. There is more to man than his essence or inner nature. We also have an outer nature. However, man's actions, whether beneficial or harmful, sinful or divine, are all expressions of a one energy. That energy finds expression through the chakras, fourteen centers of consciousness within our subtle bodies.

Many of us have seen the system for water usage at temples in India: a long pipe with faucets along its length from which many people draw water to wash their hands and feet before entering the temple. That's a nice analogy to energy and the chakras. Our subtle body is like a pipe with fourteen spigots. Water is water; it can come out of any of the spigots. It's still water. Energy can come out through any of our chakras; it's still energy.

Energy flowing through the higher chakras expresses the superconscious or spiritual nature. How do we control or direct our energy to keep it flowing through the higher chakras? Gurudeva used to say, "Energy goes where awareness flows." We control our energies through consistent meditation and devotional activities in the home shrine, chanting, performing puja, attending puja and going to the temple on a regular basis. Listening to and playing refined music and performing traditional dance and other creative arts are also ways of channeling the energies through the higher chakras.

Our regular activities determine how our energy flows. If we are engaged in spiritual pursuits, occasionally we might get up to the chakra of divine love. And hopefully we frequent the chakra of direct cognition, in which we are able to look down on our mind and understand what we like and don't like about ourselves, and work steadily to change what we don't. And we get into the chakra of willpower. These are the qualities we tend to manifest if we are engaged in regular spiritual/religious activities.

If we are not elevating the energies, we are just living an ordinary life in the force centers of willpower, reason, memory, maybe fear and

**Interfaith in Texas:** Left to right, leaders of Judaism, Hinduism, the Baptist Church, Catholicism and Islam discuss their religions' beliefs in a public forum.

occasionally anger. If we see the flow of energy impersonally, then we can control it through the activities we choose to engage in.

I like to say that we have an inner perfection and an outer imperfection. We can take heart in identifying more with the inner perfection, our soul nature, and realize the outer has its problems, which we can work on—and that is the purpose of our life on earth, to work on ourselves, to learn, evolve and ultimately know God. With this attitude, born of the belief in our divinity, we are more detached from our shortcomings and difficulties. It's just energy flowing through our various chakras, more water flowing through one spigot or another. It is not who we are. We realize that we can control that energy

flow. "Which spigot shall I turn on today? How do I want my energy to flow? Which negative habit do I want to improve today?" It all becomes easier to tackle because we look at it in an impersonal way.

The concept of the fourteen chakras can help us put our failings into perspective so that we do not become discouraged by them. Shortcomings, such as occasionally being hurtful toward others, do not at all change the fact that our essence is divine. We can deepen our experience of inner divinity and overcome shortcomings by consistently following the various practices found in the Hindu religion. When we feel good about ourselves, we can more readily identify negative patterns and change them. If we have a negative concept of our self, believing that we are inherently flawed and sinful, we are not in such a good position to advance on the spiritual path. And one thing we can all feel good about is that Hinduism assures us not only that we are not sinners, but that every human being, without exception, is destined to achieve spiritual enlightenment and liberation.

| Chakras, Centers of Consciousness |                       |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| NAME                              | ATTRIBUTE             |
| 7) sahasrāra                      | illumination          |
| 6) ājñā                           | divine sight          |
| 5) viśuddha                       | divine love           |
| 4) anāhata                        | direct cognition      |
| 3) maṇipūra                       | willpower             |
| 2) svādhishṭhāna                  | reason                |
| 1) mūlādhāra                      | memory                |
| 1) atala                          | fear, lust            |
| 2) vītala                         | raging anger          |
| 3) sutala                         | retaliatory jealousy  |
| 4) talātala                       | prolonged confusion   |
| 5) rasātala                       | pure selfishness      |
| 6) mahātala                       | absence of conscience |
| 7) pātāla                         | malice, murder        |





## LETTERS

### Hinduism in Bali

I would like to convey to Mr. Rajiv Malik and all the swamis of HINDUISM TODAY my sincere and deepest thanks for presenting such nice articles, which touch the soul and often point us in positive directions. I loved reading about Hindu schools in Bali ("Bali, Land of Offerings," Apr/May/Jun 2012), and I asked myself why in Mauritius, with a population that is more than 50% Hindu, do we not have a school, primary and secondary, to promote Hinduism—in all senses: cultural, economic, social, spiritual and intellectual. We are suffering from its absence as our youth are being drowned in Western culture by all media. All your hard work is really appreciated.

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The revival of Hinduism in Indonesia is a great story. Such a revival should occur in Afghanistan and Pakistan. All of non-Arab Asia is the great Hindu world, from Iran to Indonesia, Mongolia to Australia, including all the "stans" of Central Asia and the Buddhist Far-East of China, Japan and Korea.

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Mr. Rajiv Malik has been kind enough to courier me the Apr/May/Jun 2012 edition of HINDUISM TODAY, carrying the article on Bali and many more. The magazine on the whole is beautiful, well made, carrying a treasure of information on various subjects on Hinduism. It takes us on a virtual trip to Bali through a journey of words and rich visual images. It is the home away from home for Hindus. Written through the eyes of Rajiv Malik, giving a highly personalized 12-day account of his experiences that definitely endears the land to the reader, it offers deep insight into the sights, sounds, cultures, colors, lifestyles, beliefs and what keeps the people of Bali going.

The magazine carries varied articles, including those that provide spiritual learning, imparting knowledge to the uninitiated as well as enhancing the knowledge of those who are learned. Words of wisdom from the spiritual gurus are conveyed through their quotes. There is an account of the traditions and customs of the Hindu wedding ceremony, how the tradition has been kept intact, replete with its ancient sanctity.

Bali's tradition and historicity is brought to life through the description of its art and dances. The issue is an eye-opener for the world as it lends a peek into this hidden beauty. In a world torn with political strife and religious intolerance, Bali stands out as an

example of unity and peace, where its people live in utter harmony and with respect for each other. The issue has presented a holistic view of Bali—historically, geographically, culturally and spiritually. It is a must-read for every travel enthusiast and a true gem as a collector's edition, a true collector's treasure trove, priceless to those who know its value.

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### Siva's Five Powers

The Jul/Aug/Sep 2012 edition is really wonderful, especially "Siva's Five Powers" and "Which Yoga Should I Follow" by Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami. The information on the 15th World Sanskrit Conference was extremely useful. At the Sri Siva Vishnu Temple in Maryland, we have been teaching Sanskrit for a few years, and now some of the students have started teaching in their homes and other places. The article on the Supreme Court ruling is a must-read for all temples and Hindu organizations in the US. Thank you so much for publishing these varied, informative articles as part of HINDUISM TODAY, and please continue this service for years to come.

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I am still vibrating to the tone of "Siva's Five Powers." Amazing is all I can say. Thank you for such a magical, mystical, meditative experience. Now I am dreaming of Pieter's paintings on the walls and ceiling of my shrine room!

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### Gay Marriage

I read with interest the article, "One Hindu's Take on Gay Marriage" (Jul/Aug/Sep, 2012). Same-sex marriage is a social and legal issue, not a religious issue, in the context of the Minnesota state constitutional amendment the author is referring to. Therefore, all the Hinduism-based arguments that he uses to support gay marriage are irrelevant. Of course, homosexuals must be acknowledged and treated with fairness, respect, honor and dignity. But I don't see any reason to redefine marriage, which has always been defined in all the societies of the world for thousands of years as "the formal union of a man and a woman, typically recognized by law, by which they become husband and wife."

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### Embracing Hinduism, My Way

Apoorva Murthy's "Embracing Hinduism My Way" (Jul/Aug/Sep 2012) put on paper the feeling I myself harbor. The constant questioning and the reluctance to accept certain beliefs that she speaks of define my own relationship with Hinduism, and I, too, am working to overcome these unnecessary approaches in my own way. My generation, the students just beginning college and getting a taste of the real world, will benefit greatly from the realization that skepticism when it comes to Hinduism is unwarranted.

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### Hinduism in Early Russia

Referring to your article "Hinduism in Early Russia" (Jul/Aug/Sep 2012), the name "Russia" is only about 300 years old. The czar Peter the Great changed the name of his kingdom of Moscovia (the city of Moscow is less than 900 years old) to Russia after conquering the medieval polity of Kievan Rus. The claim that the town of Staraya Maina is 1,700 years old thus puts it beyond the histories of Rus and Russia. Of note is that Kievan Rus had as its symbol the trident of Siva, and almost all languages of Europe are Indo-European, though historical records do not connect India and Europe.

VALENTINE BEREZA  
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### Government-Run Temples

With reference to the article "Protest Against Move to Convert Temple Hall" (Hindu Press International, May 4, 2012), please note that not only Hindu temples, but the administration of several Jain temples have been taken over by bureaucratic state governments. I agree that other than Hindu and Jain temples, other faiths' places of worship are free to manage themselves, even though they may also engage in questionable administration practices—but the governments don't dare disturb!

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### Holst's Hindu Studies

Fellow readers might be interested in a review in *The New York Times* of May 11, 2012, by Zachary Woolfe of a performance of the opera "Savitri," written by the early 20th century British composer Gustav Holst. Holst is best known for his symphonic suite "The Planets," which reflects his long and deep study of astrology. But Holst was also very interested in Hinduism. He secured university

tutoring to study Sanskrit and made a number of Sanskrit-to-English translations. Besides "Savitri," which is based on a story from the *Mahabharata*, he wrote another opera, "Sita," based on the *Ramayana*, wrote choral settings for verses he translated from the *Rig Veda* and produced two pieces based on the works of Kalidas. The review of "Savitri" may be accessed at [bit.ly/holst-savitri](http://bit.ly/holst-savitri).

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### Transferring of Temple Lands

Referring to the story "State Restores 468 Acres of Temple Land" (Hindu Press International, May 24, 2012), I thought it would interest readers to know that transfers of temple land to private individuals has also happened at Puthur Siva Temple in Perintalman, Mallapuram District, Kerala. This ancient Siva temple was so rich once upon a time. You must go there to see how powerful it is.

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### Kuttuvilakkus Come in Pairs

Recently I bought *What Is Hinduism?* and have been looking through the pictures in the book. I would like to express an opinion

regarding the painting on page 182, in the chapter "The Home Shrine." There is only one *kuttuvilakku* (standing oil lamp) in the shrine. Traditionally two kuttuvilakkus are placed by a shrine on all auspicious occasions. In Sri Lanka, one lamp is only placed near the head of the deceased at a funeral.

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### Dropped Murti

Last *pradosha* in the Ramalingeshwara Temple in Bangsar, Malaysia, an arrogant priest dropped a Siva statue and it broke in two in front of a crowd of about 200 people. Looking afraid, the priest quickly tied a string around the murti, covered it with flowers and proceeded with the prayers. Were his actions appropriate?

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Dr. S.P. Sabharathnam Sivacharyar, eminent priest and scholar of the *Vedas* and *Saiva Agamas*, responds: This is a very serious offense. As per the Agamic injunctions, a Sivacharya should handle the murtis with the utmost care. If a murti is dropped, the following are to be done immediately: 1) Expiatory rites, such as performing the japa of

Aghora Astra Mantra 1,000 times during all three sessions of a day (morning, mid-day and evening), fasting on this day and making a resolution that he will not commit such offenses in future; 2) For the sake of the broken murti, Shanti Homa should be performed, with the Siva Astra as the main Deity and the Aghora Astra, Pasupata Astra, Pratyangira Astra and Vyoma Astra as the retinue Deities; 3) A new murti with the same features and measurements should be made and installed afresh; 4) With due honors and reverence, the broken pieces of the murti should be dropped in a river or in a sacred temple tank; 5) Congregational prayer may be performed to alleviate any future calamities indicated by the incident.

Letters with writer's name, address and daytime phone number should be sent to:

**Letters, Hinduism Today**  
107 Kaholalele Road  
Kapaa, Hawaii, 96746-9304 USA  
or faxed to: (808) 822-4351  
or visit: [www.hinduismtoday.com/letters](http://www.hinduismtoday.com/letters)

Letters may be edited for space and clarity and may appear in electronic versions of HINDUISM TODAY.

## Putting First Things First

How to discover who we are and what *really* matters

IN 1980, SUBHASH CHOUDHARY ARRIVED from India and soon found himself in a US high school. The sense of dislocation drove him to ponder the great questions: "Who am I? What does it mean to be a Hindu?..." Three years later, he found HINDUISM TODAY: "One of the best things that ever happened to me," he explains. "Here were my answers and a wealth of understanding. I still read the magazine today. It helps keep clarity of mind and gives the strength to recognize the right thing to do."

By 2003, Subhash had become a vice president at Xerox. Everything was going well except that he worked long hours away from home. "I began to ache at seeing my boys growing up without me, and I feared I would lose them." After much introspection and many family meetings, it all became clear and Subhash made his decision. He turned his back on the bright career and turned to what really mattered: "my family and my faith—my passion."

Today, he works reasonable hours as

a consultant and spends his spare time sharing his inspiration with his boys and teaching and promoting Hinduism at every opportunity. With copies of HINDUISM TODAY ever in his briefcase, Subhash is ready to share with youngsters, parents, teachers and whoever shows interest.

Over the last 13 years, Mr. and Mrs. Choudhary have donated regularly to the Hinduism Today Production Fund, which is a part of Hindu Heritage Endowment. And they have included the fund in their estate plan. "We cannot say enough good things about Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, who had the vision to launch the magazine that would answer our greatest needs so perfectly. We want it to continue to grow and give Hindus everywhere knowledge of their heritage, and the knowledge of who they are—and show Hinduism to the whole world as the remarkable model of sustainability and continuity that it is. We do not know of a greater or purer cause, and feel privileged to be a small part of it."



**To make children everywhere aware of their heritage:** Subhash and Ronika Choudhary and the boys, left to right, Akhil, Anand and Arjun.

If you share the Choudharys' vision and enthusiasm for our great common cause, please donate—now or in your estate plan—to the Hinduism Today Production Fund at: [www.hheonline.org/donate/pf](http://www.hheonline.org/donate/pf).

Read about the fund at [www.hheonline.org/productionfund](http://www.hheonline.org/productionfund). Subscribe to the Production Fund e-newsletter at: [www.gurudeva.org/email-news](http://www.gurudeva.org/email-news). Or chat with us: 1-808-634-5407 • [hhe@hindu.org](mailto:hhe@hindu.org)



## QUOTES & QUIPS

Greatness is not what we do, but how we do what we do.

**Swami Chinmayananda** (1916–1993), *Vedantist lecturer and founder of Chinmaya Mission*

When there is a fight, at least two parties are involved. So there can be no fight with you if you refuse to participate. **Paramahansa Yogananda** (1893–1952)

There is nothing higher than dharma. Verily, that which is dharma is truth. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 1.4.14*

As the body needs food to survive and grow, the soul needs love. Love instills a strength and vitality that even mother's milk cannot provide. All of us live and long for real love. We are born and die searching for such love. Children, love each other and unite in pure love. **Mata Amritanandamayi**, *Kerala-based hugging saint and HINDUISM TODAY's Hindu of the Year 1993*

Thou art nothing, O man, but enchanted

Being, and His ever-enchanted, ever-be-loved Energy. Siva-Shakti is thy name—even as it is the name of all things. Now, the nature of Shakti is rasa. It is juicy, tasteful, and beautiful, infinitely and forever. This is the basic theory of Indian culture, the fundamental justification of India's arts and her literature, her aspirations and achievements, her life and her actions. And today her renaissance means her return to this fundamental doctrine of life. **Subrahmanya Bharati** (1882–1921), *Tamil poet*

Japa, austerities, observances, pilgrimage, sacrifice, charity—all these become a mere waste without understanding the guru tattva. *Kularnava Tantra 24*

The Higgs Boson walks into a Catholic church. The priest says, "What are you

doing here?" HB says, "You can't have mass without me." *A tweet from Brian Malow, the Science Comedian*

The value of a man should be seen in what he gives and not in what he is able to receive. **Albert Einstein** (1879–1955)

Self inquiry directly leads to Realization by removing the obstacles which make you think that the Self is not already realized. **Ramana Maharshi** (1879–1950)

It is mind-boggling to consider that we have available to us a language which has been spoken for 4,000–7,000 years that appears to be in every respect a perfect language designed for enlightened communication. But the most stunning aspect of the discovery is this: NASA, the

DID YOU KNOW?

## Surgery Was Used In Ancient Bharat

**W**HILE INDIA'S TRADITIONAL MEDICAL SYSTEM, AYURVEDA, is strong in balancing the body, maintaining health and preventing disease, Western medicine today excels at repairing the body when serious injury occurs. It seems both approaches are necessary in our lives, and it turns out this is not a new idea in India. As far back as 600 BCE, Mother India laid claim not only to sophisticated preventive medicine, but to advanced surgery as well.

One of the best-known medical texts from this time period is the *Sushruta Samhita*, by the eponymous acharya who is widely regarded as the father of Indian surgery. In his detailed work, Acharya Sushruta describes 300 types of operations, including treatment for twelve types of fractures and six types of dislocations. He used 125 surgical instruments—scalpels, lancets, needles and more—mostly crafted from the jaws of animals and birds. Also mentioned are a number of stitching methods, using horse hair or tree bark fibers as thread. He also details amputation, rhinoplasty, Caesarean and cranial surgeries.

The widely recognized wisdom of ayurveda and the



lesser-known work of Acharya Sushruta have shed light on the fact that ancient India was far ahead of her time in the understanding of the human body, its care and repair.

most advanced research center in the world for cutting-edge technology, has discovered that Sanskrit, the world's oldest spiritual language, is the only unambiguous spoken language on the planet. Considering Sanskrit's status as a spiritual language, a further implication of this discovery is that the age-old dichotomy between religion and science is an entirely unjustified one. **Rick Briggs**, *senior research scientist with NASA, writing in AI Magazine, Spring 1985*

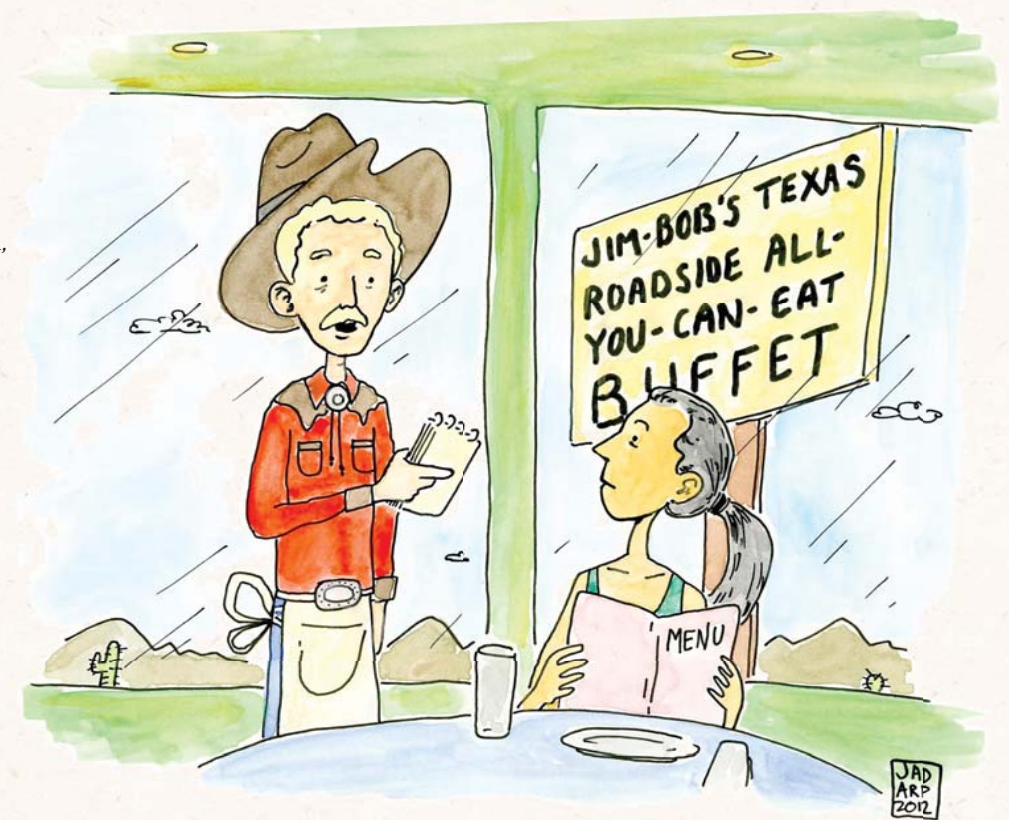
Don't be arrogant, because arrogance kills curiosity and passion. **Mina Bissell**, *biologist at Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory*

Monks work, too. They are in the business of Isness.

When we think about someone, we're sending a thought form to that person, and that thought form is affecting them. If it is a positive, uplifting thought, it affects them in a positive, uplifting way. If it is a critical thought, it affects them in a negative way. **Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami**, *publisher of HINDUISM TODAY*

When we encounter wickedness in others, let us be compassionate, for truly there is no intrinsic evil. **Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami** (1927–2001)

## A VEGETARIAN NIGHTMARE



*Vegetarian options? You bet! Breadsticks, toast, half a toast, salt crackers, sugar packets and coffee.*

## BASICS OF HINDUISM Devotional Singing

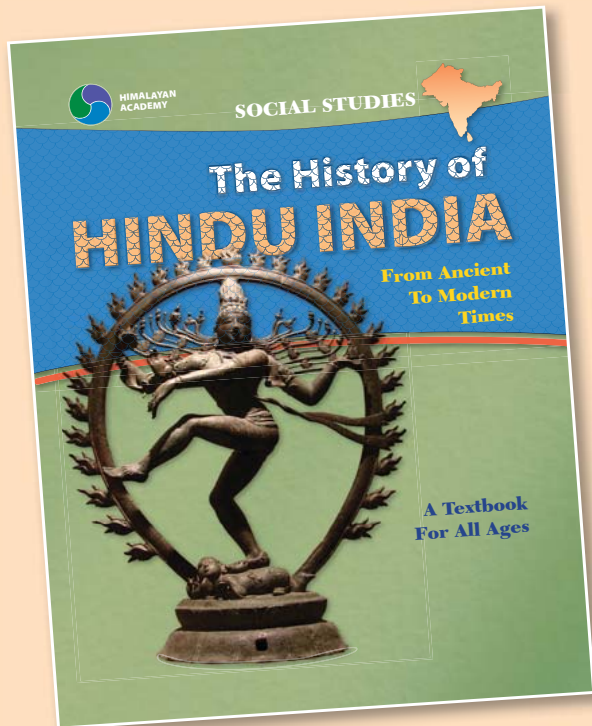
**T**HE EXPRESSION OF BHAKTI, OR DEVOTION, through song is a central practice in Hinduism, dating back untold millennia. Awakening love in the heart, devotional singing and chanting by oneself or in a group celebrates and worships God, the Gods and one's guru and opens oneself up to their divine grace. Many Hindus sing bhajans daily before their home shrine as part of a morning religious vigil, setting a spiritual tone for the day, or during evening devotional practices, carrying them to celestial realms during sleep. In most ashrams, the daily routine of worship includes group chanting of bhajans or a practice called *kirtan*, which includes dancing.

Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami wrote, "These hymns are actually

heard by the subtle beings. Devas in the Second World come, hover around and near us and rejoice in our singing. If we are deeply devoted and inspired, then even the Mahadevas of the Third World will hover above the devas in their magnificent bodies of light, showering blessings to those who are singing or chanting prayerfully. You may not be able to see these subtle beings, but you can feel their presence, feel a holy atmosphere around you."

*I'll wreath Him in garlands. I'll hug Him to heart. I'll sing Him His name and dance with gifts of flowers. Singing and dancing, seek the Lord. This alone I know.* TIRUMANTIRAM





# Finally, a Fair & Accurate Presentation of Hindu History for Children

A 128-page sixth-grade social studies course from the editors of HINDUISM TODAY

HINDUISM TODAY's Hindu history book is both correct and authentic, and definitely better than I have seen in any school textbook. If each Hindu were to learn and remember this narrative, the Hindu community would be better off in this increasingly pluralistic society.

Shiva G. Bajpai, Professor Emeritus, California State University Northridge

While no book can possibly encompass fully the breadth, complexity and plurality of Hindu practice and belief, the Hindu American Foundation finds that this work compromises little in describing the universal ideals of Hinduism that have emerged from its wondrous diversity.

Hindu American Foundation, USA

This presentation provides a needed counterbalance to textbooks on Hinduism which are sometimes inaccurate or fail to give a perspective that would be recognizable to most Hindus. Though designed for sixth-graders, I could imagine myself recommending it as review material for my college students.

Jeffery D. Long, Ph.D, Chair, Department of Religious Studies, Elizabethtown College, PA, USA

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## OPINION

# Adi Saiva Priests and Funeral Rites

Scriptural rules, reasons and exceptions examined and explained

The following analysis by Dr. Sabharathnam is drawn from four of the mula or root Agamas: Suprabhedagama, Analagama, Vijayagama and Sarvoktagama. It was prepared at our request in response to the issue of requiring all priests in Hindu temples in the West to perform funerals when they would not do so in India. Here he presents the view of the Adi Saiva priests, also known as Sivacharyars.

THERE ARE TWO CLASSES OF BRAHMINs—ADI saivas (*siva vipras* or Sivabrahmins) and the common brahmins (*samanya vipras*). Only the Sivabrahmins have been authorized to perform the temple rituals for the benefit of the world and for the welfare of the village or city. The chapter "Acharya-asya Varjya-avarjya Kriyavaliḥ" finds a place in many *Saivagamas*. The title may be translated as "List of activities which are to be avoided and those which are to be undertaken by the Adi Saiva priests." Funeral rites are included in the list of activities to be avoided.

Rituals are of two kinds—family-related and temple-related. Family-related rituals are based on the Vedic treatises such as the *Apastambha*, *Bodhayana* and others. These rituals are known as *samskaras*, sacramental activities. Such treatises have prescribed as many as 40 *samskaras*, such as the ceremonial naming the child (*namakarana*), tonsure (*chudakarana*) and so forth. The last *samskara* is *antyeshti*, the funeral rite. The number of *samskaras* varies according to each of the four castes. It is best that each caste have a priest hailing from its own lineage to perform these sacramental rituals. If not, the priest of the next higher caste could perform those rites to the families of his own caste and the next lower castes.

The *Parameshvara Agama* states: "Adi Saiva priest and the Adi Saivas should be concerned only with those activities which are related to Siva and the temples. They should always remain devoted to the six activities: systematic study of the *Vedas* and the *Agamas*; teaching the *Vedas* and *Agamas* to competent disciples; performing the *yajnas* (sacrifices) related to Siva; training competent disciples in the performance of such Siva-related *yajnas*; giving donations to Siva-related events or activities; and accepting donations offered to them for the sake of Siva. They are entitled to perform the Vedic *samskaras* for the families of their own community. They have to desist from doing these for the families of other communities. They have to desist from performing the Vedic sacrifices such as *ashvamedha*, *rajasuya* (both for kings) and others and from taking part in these sacrifices. More specifically, they should never perform the funeral rites for families other than those of their own community."

The sages to whom *Parameshvara Agama* is being told raise a question: "Why are Adi Saivas prohibited from doing the funeral rites or other *samskaras* for the families of other communities? What is wrong, if they undertake such activities for others?" Siva responded, "Since an Adi Saiva priest should remain always



Last rites: Cremation along the Ganges in Allahabad, India

established in the consciousness of oneness with Siva through *nyasa* (invocation by mantra) and contemplation, mentally performing the worship of Siva even while he is out of the temple complex, he has to excuse himself from doing those rituals to be performed under the polluted context. If he performs those rituals, the vibrant presence of kala-mantras installed in his body through the highest kind of *diksha* would get nullified. Once it is nullified, it would be very difficult to regain that energetic presence of *siva-kalas*. But such nullity would not occur if he performs these rites for his own family or for the families of his own community, since the members of his community are Siva-related.

"But if the circumstance forces him to perform such rites due to the non-availability of a Vedic priest (common brahmin), then, for the goodness of the bereaved family, he can perform these rites. After performing these, he should purify himself and should not enter the temple for seven days. He should fast for seven days, engaging in the constant incantation of Aghora Astra mantra. On the seventh day, he should once again be anointed with specially consecrated water, as it was done to him on the occasion of the highest *diksha*. Only after such expiation should he enter the temple."

This is the position of Adi Saivas as far as the funeral and other household sacraments are concerned.

DR. S. P. SABHARATHNAM SIVACHARYAR, of the Adi Saiva priest lineage, is an expert in ancient Tamil and Sanskrit, specializing in the *Vedas*, *Agamas* and *Shilpa Shastras*. This excerpt is from his recent translation of the *Paushkara Agama*.





HINDU TEMPLE OF MINNESOTA



RICHARD B. LEVINE/NEWS.COM



MARYLAND SHIVA VISHNU TEMPLE



RAM TEMPLE TORONTO

**What's new?** (clockwise from above) Parade Deities circle the Hindu Temple of Minnesota in a 2009 Raja Gopuram Mahotsav festival; priests perform Sudharshan puja in front of the Minnesota central sanctum; in a scene that could be right out of India, devotees prepare garlands for worship at the

Maryland Shiva Vishnu Temple; at the beginning of congregational worship and preaching—called pravachan—held each Sunday from 9AM to noon at the Shri Ram Mandir in Mississauga, Canada, devotees are greeted by the pundit with “Har Har Mahadev” and respond the same with their hands raised

## SPECIAL FEATURE

# Hindu Temples of the West Adjust, Adapt, Improvise...

Local community needs, from counseling to funerals, extend beyond the present-day functions of most temples in India

**T**HE FIRST TEMPLES BUILT IN THE WEST WERE INTENDED TO PROVIDE IMMIGRANTS A FAMILIAR place for worship, something akin to what they were accustomed to in India. The initial challenges were largely logistical—selecting a location, dealing with financing and zoning, bringing temple artisans and cajoling priests to cross the ocean. Today those issues have mostly been mastered and Hindu temples have begun to expand, not always willingly, into other forms of service needed to meet the requirements of the faith community: counseling, youth education, elder care, disaster response and interfaith dialogue. The evolution of these ancillary forms of service is under intense discussion. We invite you into the conversation through interviews with leaders in the US and Canada.



This report was inspired by HINDUISM TODAY's participation in the First Hindu Priests' Conference, as reported on page 30. In fact, it may be useful for you to first read that article and then come back to this one. It's OK, we'll wait here....

**H**INDU TEMPLES IN THE WEST FIND THEMSELVES ON THE cusp of change—challenging, unexpected, imperative change. Slowly new needs and duties are infiltrating their lives, forcing them to respond and evolve. There is no rule book or precedent to call upon, since conditions in India are so radically different. Suddenly managers and professional priests who know full well how to perform the most exquisite rituals are confronted with confounding calls for help. Participate in a local interfaith council? Develop a curriculum for youth studies? Give a tour to a high school class and explain Hinduism to them in thirty minutes? For all these needs, new skills must be learned. And those are the easy ones. Try dealing with domestic violence, a Hindu teen in police custody or hundreds of refugees from a natural disaster arriving on your temple doorstep.

However, there is a wealth of wisdom out there to be called upon, derived from the accumulated experiences and practical knowledge of established temples and other immigrant communities who have been doing this for 200 years. Following these leads, temple managers are learning to thrive and avoid the pitfalls. At the same time, there is controversy about just where the limits lie.

Seeking scriptural guidance, we consulted an *Agama* expert, Dr. S.P. Sabharathnam Sivacharyar of Chennai. We asked him for a list of temple activities (below) found in the *Saiva Agamas*, which are the accepted authority governing temple design, construction, worship and general operation. We were surprised to learn that his list includes most of the “new” functions being performed by temples in the West. Even disaster relief is there. Apparently temples are arising to fulfill the functions of the traditional village—not only providing a place of worship but seeing to the spiritual, cultural, educational and even security needs of the community.

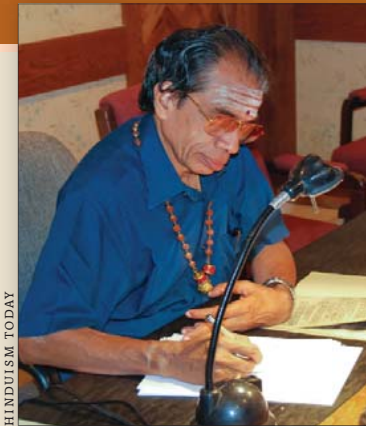
## What Do the Saiva Agamas Say about Temple Activities?

Dr. S. P. Sabharathnam Sivacharyar (at right), of the Adisaiva priest lineage, is an expert in ancient Tamil and Sanskrit, specializing in the Vedas, Agamas and Shilpa Shastras.

**M**ANY AGAMIC TEXTS STRESS THE IMPORTANCE OF A TEMPLE AS the hub of human society. They provide a series of activities to be undertaken by the management to promote a wide spectrum of salubrious, peaceful and enlightened life. The specific activities prescribed by in *Suprabheda*, *Vijaya*, *Anala*, *Prodgita* and other *Agamas* to be undertaken by temples are:

1. Arrange for the systematic **study** of the **Vedas** and the **Agamas**
2. Establish **schools**, from the lower to the higher levels
3. Arrange for the learning of local **language**, Sanskrit and the other 18 languages of India
4. Arrange for the learning of **dance** and **music**
5. Arrange for **religious discourses** and seminars
6. Arrange for the study of **astronomy** and **astrology**
7. Arrange for the learning of simple **yogic disciplines**
8. Train a competent person from each community in the **rituals** concerned with **home shrines** and other sacraments
9. Employ suitable persons to **speak** on the significance of temple rituals and festivals

10. Arrange for common village **festivals** and festivals for village Deities
11. Maintain **hospitals** and **libraries**
12. Create various **endowments** to look after disabled, diseased and disowned persons
13. Maintain **alms-houses** and **shelters** for the benefit of travelers and mendicants
14. Arrange for **feeding the poor**
15. Support for **single mothers** and **widows**, including employment at the temple itself
15. Create a board of learned persons and elders belonging to all communities to **settle conflicts** between groups of people
16. Take precautionary steps to **avert natural calamities** during rainy season
17. Maintain a **cow stable** and **elephant stable**
18. Maintain **flower** and **fruit** gardens



HINDUISM TODAY

## Interfaith, Education & Holidays

Invariably, soon after a group decides to build a temple, they are approached by the local interfaith council, whose members are delighted to invite new fellowships to join their dialogs and activities. In response, a Hindu representative is sent to the periodic council meetings.

Dr. Anantanand Rambachan, professor of religion at St. Olaf College and a frequent lecturer at the Hindu Temple of Minnesota, is a veteran participant in the interfaith movement. He told HINDUISM TODAY, “The Hindu representative is often an amateur—an engineer, doctor or economist who is a self-taught Hindu specialist. These people from other traditions are highly trained in theology.”

Fortunately, the interfaith movement itself owes much to Hindu ideas, and participation comes easily. For example, Pandit Roopnauth Sharma of Toronto's Ram Mandir is vice president of the



SHIVA VISHNU TEMPLE MARYLAND

**Walking the talk:** (left) Ganesha Temple of Queens, New York, helped launch the neighborhood's first “Inter-faith Unity Walk” (right) Local school children (including a large percentage of Indian origin) get a tour of the Shri Ram Mandir of Mississauga, outside Toronto, Canada

Ontario Multi-Faith Council, which represents all religions in the province. He has also helped to create multi-faith teams to counsel hospital patients and people caught up in the correctional system.

A related public service is giving the opening blessing at public events, as local governments seek

to be inclusive of all religions represented in their jurisdiction. This takes the form of opening city council meetings, or other government functions, farm fairs and hospital inaugurations. In the most famous of all such blessings, Maryland's Sri Siva Vishnu Temple provided the priest for the celebration of Diwali at the White House.

Temple representative are occasionally invited to speak at churches, synagogues and mosques. Sometimes interfaith work leads to “pulpit exchange.” For example, Pandit Sharma delivered a sermon at the rabbi's synagogue on Friday evening; the rabbi did the same at the temple on Sunday morning.

Requests from local schools, elementary



SHRI RAM MANDIR ONTARIO

through college, to bring groups to the temple for a field outing are common. The goal is to give the students a basic introduction to Hinduism, so it is relatively easy to train a set of volunteers in a standard presentation. Dr. Siva Subramaniam of Maryland's Siva Vishnu Temple reports that his team created a volunteers' handbook which explains each of the temple Deities as well as the temple architecture. He especially enjoys touring older students: “With university students, there will be a discussion of the differences in philosophy, as most of them are Christians. We try to correct stereotyped impressions.” Tours tend to have a significant impact on young students, as a Hindu temple with its

Deities and Sanskrit chanting may well be their first exotic religious experience.

Speaking of unanticipated demands placed on a temple, consider holidays. The US has several secular federal holidays which resonate with Hindus, and which some of us celebrate with the rest of the country. On January 1, New Year's Day, many Hindus go to the temple, even though it is not the Hindu new year. The second Sunday in May is Mother's Day, an American invention first observed in 1908. Not associated with any religion (and not an official holiday), it is enthusiastically celebrated with special pujas and programs by all temples interviewed. Father's Day, in June, is observed by some, though in a simpler manner. It is interesting that Thanksgiving is largely ignored—perhaps because it is thought to be Christian or perhaps due to the nearly mandatory sacrifice of a turkey.

## Media Outreach

Nearly every temple has a web site, ranging from the basic (Hindu Temple of Arizona) to the functional (Hindu Temple Society to North America) to the spectacular (BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir Houston). Most websites aim only to keep devotees informed of events and activities at the temple, and not so much as a source of information and inspiration about the religion.

A related area is media outreach, particularly seeing that press releases are given to local publications announcing upcoming events or explaining festivals and providing responses to inquiries from local reporters. They may exist, but we did not encounter in our interviews anyone specifically tasked with media coordination. In all cases, we were speaking with temple trustees who handled these matters directly. As with everything else, they have learned on the job, and there is likely room for improvement.

## Bringing Eastern Culture to the West



SHRI RAM MANDIR ONTARIO

Nine young girls are worshiped on the ninth night of the yearly Navaratri festival at the Shri Ram Mandir near Toronto



## Youth Involvement

Hindu temples in the West devote great effort toward engaging their youth. Every temple we interviewed has extensive classes, usually on Sunday and often running from preschool through high school, plus summer camps. There is no standardized course of study: the material has been developed locally, on an ad hoc basis.

Much of what is taught are stories from the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and *Puranas*. Less emphasized are the history of Hinduism, theology, ethics, yoga, meditation and the esoterics of temple worship—its meaning, significance and effect on one's life. All temples offer language, music and dance classes, with the latter two usually given on a fee basis by professional teachers. All these are held on weekends; absent is any kind of day care facility for little children during the week.

Dr. Srinivasa Yegnasubramaniam is a retired scientist who has been associated with the Sri Venkateswara Temple and Community Center in Bridgewater, New Jersey; he is also a key supporter of the Sringeri Sadhana Center in Pennsylvania. He recommends that "temples focus more on activities which bring our children into understanding the basics of our beliefs. The present system doesn't convey how to understand the rituals, so the children think them primitive and superstitious. They do not relate to them and consequently do not want to come to the temple."

Nevertheless, youth are an important part of the volunteer corps of each temple.



In some, they serve alongside the adults wherever needed; in others, specific areas of responsibility are carved out—controlling parking during festivals, for example. London's BAPS Swaminarayan Naesden Temple is without compare in this respect. As just one example, the operation of their shoe checking station for Diwali is entirely under the control of youth ages 12 to 15, with nomi-

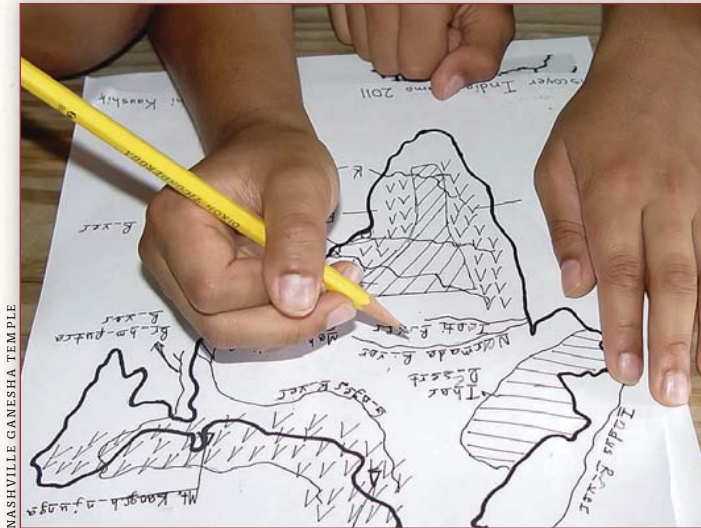
nal adult oversight. The children themselves pass on the skills to the next group, and the task is performed flawlessly each year. This typifies the BAPS policy of getting the children invested in the organization by giving them "ownership" of specific areas of responsibility.

In America the nearest parallel is at Dallas Fort Worth. There the youth are responsible

**Nashville summer camp:** (left) traditional designs with various colored grains; learning the geography of India through maps

for organizing the temple's huge Holi festival, the annual Mother's Day celebration and parts of other events, such as the Diwali rangoli competition. Holi is a big hit with the youth because their non-Hindu friends are eager to participate in this exuberantly joyous festival, dousing one another (and any nearby authority figures) with bright colors. Temple trustee Ranna Jani admits they have to repaint the hall afterwards, even though colors are supposed to be thrown only outside. But "it needs painting yearly anyway," she reasons.

In Texas, Pandit Rajendra Sharma—now retired from the Hindu Worship Society of Houston—reports that the Lakshmi Narayan Mandir has a youth-run program of bhajan, kirtan discourses and havan from 10:30 to 12:30 every Sunday. He lamented that parents sometimes put a damper on their children's enthusiasm. "One young man at our temple used to wake his parents up every Sunday morning, 'Let's go to the mandir.' They did this for six or seven months, then stopped. When I met him later and asked what happened, he confided, 'My parents do not get up in the morning on Sunday.'"



most American churches. Many Christian churches sponsor troops which meet on the premises; the Mormons in particular have an extensive scouting program. We did not find any Hindu temple with a scouting program, even though there is at least one series of Hindu scout merit badges ([www.naha.us](http://www.naha.us)).

Many temples provide secular education programs for the youth, such as preparatory classes for SAT tests, and a few have debating teams. Contrary to what one might think, such activities appear to be appropriate for temples, as they fall under the education functions described in the *Agamas*.

Though the temples we interviewed are generally aware of the needs of college students, they offer only a few token programs to address them, such as organizing transportation and supplying priests for campus events held by Hindu student organizations. Students at the University of Maryland have taken matters into their own hands. Once a semester they hire a bus and bring 30 or 40 students to visit four area temples. They go in the morning to one temple, have darshan and breakfast, then to another for darshan and lunch, the third for darshan and an obligatory snack, and ending at the last for worship and dinner.

Nonreligious activities may also be organized for the youth. Pandit Rajendra has organized soccer and basketball. In Toronto, the temples take sports to a different level with their own cricket league and a tournament each year. Otherwise, we did not hear many reports of temple-organized sports activities, probably because they are abundantly available in other forums.

Also in Toronto, it is a requirement that all high-school seniors perform forty hours of community service. The Ram Temple there puts them to work cooking, cleaning, washing, ushering, etc.

Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts are popular in

## Educating Our Children



(left to right) Children attending 2011 summer camp at the Nashville Ganesha Temple examine a early model of their temple; young boy dressed for a play at the Shiva Vishnu Temple, Maryland; storytelling time in Minnesota







DINODIA.COM

## Counseling and Crisis Response

Counseling and intervention is a touchy area. Dr. Yegnasubramaniam noted that during his time as a trustee, the temple steered clear of such activities, wary of legal ramifications. The Nashville Ganesha Temple has a midway solution: they invite local experts to address meetings of selected groups at the temple to explain their services. When a certified marriage counselor described what he does and the confidentiality he provides, at least two couples went in for help. Dr. Rambhachan points out that temples already have a stock of experienced counselors: retired medical doctors, who have basic training in counseling and psychology. "Perhaps," he suggests, "there are people already in the community

who may be called upon to serve in these roles, or train for them."

In India it is common to consult a priest for astrological advice, but Western temples are leery of having priests venture beyond the setting of auspicious dates. Pandit Sharma of Toronto cautions, "To identify an appropriate date, that is not high level astrology, but to decide on someone's future, I do not encourage that." Nevertheless, congregants do consult priests about difficulties in life—in business or health, for example—often requesting expiatory rites on their behalf. This is not counseling in the Western sense, and the temples tend not to interfere with the practice. One trustee said legal liability could

result if they promoted it. The Nashville Ganesha Temple forbids its priests to offer astrological advice in any form.

Some temples do find ways deal with family crises, such as domestic abuse and the problems faced by single mothers. The Shiva Vishnu Temple in Maryland created a Mitra Mandala (Circle of Friends) to offer free counseling. Dr. Subramaniam explains, "It is a group of people, including a social worker, a psychologist and lay people, who are available to any devotee for any problem, including spousal abuse, problems with the kids or with elderly parents."

In May, 2012, the Hindu Temple of Minnesota launched a confidential crisis hot line called Your Crisis Center (or YCC). The center functions as a referral service, directing people to the agencies or professionals who can help them. Dr. Shashikant Sane, the temple president, explained, "We make a clear-cut statement that we are not the primary treatment people; we're the advisors and this is done exclusively on a voluntary basis by the people who are being called." They worked out this system in consultation with the temple's lawyers to avoid legal entanglement.

The Nashville Ganesha Temple has a program specifically to help single mothers.

.....  
**Humanness abounds:** (clockwise from above) A young couple in need of marriage counseling; a marriage ceremony in progress; a free health clinic at the Nashville Ganesha Temple; devotees prepare sandwiches for the needy

## Medical Assistance and Feeding the Poor



SHIVA VISHNU TEMPLE MARYLAND



NASHVILLE GANESHA TEMPLE



Radha Kirtane shared, "We have fifteen single mothers in the community. It is not easy; half of them do not have family support and are in financial need." These single mothers, she points out, tend to be isolated. Notably, the *Agamas* urge temples to help single mothers and widows, including providing employment at the temple if that is needed.

In many cities, local Indian associations provide support for single mothers and other community members in distress. Examples are the India Association of North Texas in Dallas and India House in Houston. When there is a strong association nearby, the temples will refer people to them, instead of developing their own programs.

We encountered only one temple with an extensive counseling program for youth: Toronto's Ram Temple has engaged with the local judicial system, and Pundit Sharma has personally represented youth at legal hearings. Representatives from most temples reported they have encountered few or no problems of this nature among the youth. Beyond this one program, few temples said they had ventured into offering legal support, though they would provide referrals to such services.

A specialized form of counseling is provided by trained chaplains. A chaplain provides spiritual counseling for members of all faiths in a hospital or hospice setting, on a college campus, in the military or on call with the local police and fire department. There are only a few Hindu chaplains in North America, including one in the US

Army; so temples are often called upon to fulfill that role, such as by visiting sick Hindu patients in local hospitals. Until recently, chaplaincy was a viable professional career choice for the right person. But like the religion editors of local newspapers before them, hospital chaplains as a group have become victims of budget cuts in our troubled economy. As discussed at the Pittsburgh Priest Conference, the profession is also undergoing a change—from "chaplaincy" to "spiritual counseling services," with part-time volunteers staffing once-paid positions.

Kunda Vaikunth of the Nashville Ganesha Temple brought an unusual perspective to the discussion. "I work in a psychiatric hospital and find the people brought up in India are not willing to use the counseling services available to them. I'm not sure how beneficial it is to that generation. It's a different story for the younger generation raised here in the US, those under 30, because their mindset is different. But marriage and other counseling services for people who are raised in India—it does not work."



SHUTTERSTOCK

## Weddings and Marital Support

Just as in India, Western temples perform weddings—either supplying the priest for another venue or holding the wedding in a temple hall. Surprisingly, Dr. Sabharathnam tells us the *Agamas* do not sanction marriages being conducted at temples, even though this practice is found in India.

To make a wedding official in the West, the person conducting it must be duly authorized by the state or province in which it is performed. The authorization procedure is usually simple, but necessary: any lapse can bring legal consequences. Once a priest at a New Jersey temple performed a wedding for a Hindu couple even though he was not registered with the state. He asked another priest to provide the necessary certificate. A few years later the husband filed for divorce, and the marriage certificate was deemed a forgery. Legally speaking, no marriage had taken place. This led to a complex legal nightmare involving custody of the children, visa issues and more. The temple now insists that couples have a civil ceremony in addition to the wedding at the temple.

Ranna Jani, a founding trustee of the Dal-

las/Fort Worth Hindu Temple, recalls a match-making service her team attempted. It was not successful, and the trustees ultimately concluded it was not something the temple should be doing. Just as in India, though, the parents and couple consult the priests regarding astrological compatibility for a proposed match, and always for choosing the auspicious day for the wedding.

The Catholic Church has a well-regarded counseling series for engaged couples called "When Families Marry," which discusses everything from finances to who does the housework. But only one temple of those interviewed has offered premarital counseling beyond the astrological assessment. When pandit Rajendra Sharma was involved with the Hindu Worship Society of Texas, he talked with youth about marriage. He reports that those whose parents were not happily married commonly queried, "Why should I want to get married and become miserable like them?" His basic advice was "Getting married is very easy; staying married is difficult. You have to give and take, work it out, talk to each other, compromise."





NASHVILLE GANESHA TEMPLE

## Looking After the Elderly

Concern for the elderly inexorably faces each temple community. Seniors may be among the temple's most active attendees, and often there are programs just for them.

Traditionally a couple is responsible for the care of their aging parents. In India family-based care continues (though high-end retirement homes are being built even there). Many in the West are not able or willing to shoulder this duty, and temple groups try to fill the gap. Some, like the Hindu Temple of Minnesota and the Siva Temple in Flint, Michigan, have a plan in place to provide formal old folks' housing nearby. The 25-unit Ananda Bhavan residence at the Vishnu Mandir in Toronto, completed in 2010, is an example.

The Maryland Siva Vishnu Temple has a senior citizens' club that meets once a week, arranges lectures on topics seniors are interested in and organizes a program called "gentle yoga." Club members also mentor the youth in their areas of expertise, passing on decades of hard-earned knowledge. Dr.

Subramaniam told HINDUISM TODAY they are considering a home visitation program for the housebound. Another temple invites government experts to explain tax issues to seniors and is setting up a hotline specifically for seniors' urgent needs.

Temples in the West vary in their attitudes toward the elderly. Some suggested that families or other community organizations should take responsibility. One trustee admitted, "Our religious professionals associated with a temple are the priests, and they have neither time nor training to handle these new areas of concern."

Kunda Vaikunth of the Nashville Ganesha Temple described an experimental system to transport elderly people to the temple on Sunday. On that day buses follow a reduced schedule. But renting a van and arranging for drivers became an organizational nightmare, and the project was dropped. "It's easy to jump into many areas that people would like to see," Kunda cautioned, "but it's hard to sustain them."

## Community Service

Public social service is part of the mix, most commonly medical camps, food drives and disaster relief. Medical camps, of course, are logical, given the Hindu community's large number of physicians. Most conduct these once a month, offering a basic health checkup with advice on follow-up for potentially serious problems. The Dallas/Fort Worth Temple provides a free clinic run by volunteer doctors every other Sunday. Temple devotees and local neighbors alike use its services. Blood drives have become popular in recent years.

At least two temples in the US—Minnesota and Dallas/Fort Worth—have participated in court-ordered programs, where service at the temple (yard work, for example) is done to meet a sentence requiring a certain number of hours of community service.

The Nashville Ganesha Temple participates in the local projects of Habitat for Humanity, a highly respected Christian-inspired organization that builds homes for poor people using volunteer labor. The temple joins with other religious organizations to raise money and enlist volunteers—usually fathers and sons—to build homes in their area.

Food drives, contributions to the local food bank and preparing meals for the homeless are more and more common, as is raising money for disaster relief. Many temples raised funds after the 2004 tsunami, mostly for those areas impacted in India. Several sent representatives to Tamil Nadu to oversee use of the funds. When the 2001 Gujarat earthquake destroyed 400,000 homes, the Nashville Ganesha Temple raised money by inviting the local community for tours. Radha Kirtane commented, "I think this was the first time that the Nashville people saw the

temple for what it was and how things were done. They also enjoyed the food."

Rarely, disaster comes knocking on one's own door. In 2005 the Dallas/Fort Worth Temple took in hundreds of refugees bused to Texas from the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. Then three weeks later, they were hosting evacuees from Hurricane Rita. Even Kauai's Hindu Monastery, home of HINDUISM TODAY, became involved in disaster relief following Hurricane Iniki in 1992. The most powerful (Category 5) hurricane to ever strike the Hawaiian islands, Iniki laid waste to the little island. The monastery provided spiritual solace and material assistance to neighbors, baking bread each day since electricity was down and neighbors all had electric stoves. Most appreciated of all, it provided easy access to the Wailua River for bathing during the ensuing six weeks without running water in homes.

The recent influx of Bhutanese refugees from camps in Nepal has provided a service opportunity. Because the refugees have been settled in major cities across the country, most are near a Hindu temple—practically the only thing they find familiar in America. The Dallas/Fort Worth Temple responded by setting up a committee to help on many fronts: transportation, money, finding apartments, jobs, driving lessons, English lessons and advice on how to live in the West. The Nashville temple had its high school students teach English and computer skills. "Initially," recalls Radha Kirtane, "the Bhutanese were scared of anything other than their own group. At the time some of them converted to Christianity because the churches gave them financial help which Hindus did not initially. But now it is very different. It is great to see how far they have come."

In some areas the refugees have settled in,



RICHARD B. LEVINE/NEWSCOM



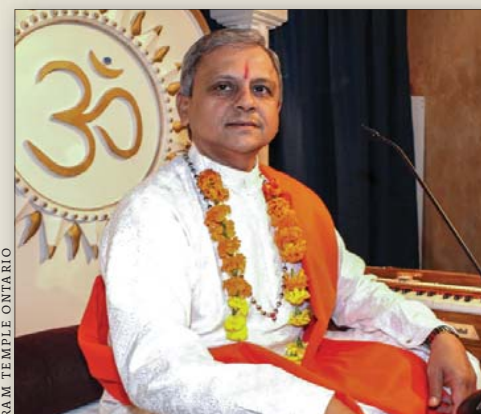
HINDU AMERICAN SEVA CHARITIES

**The spirit of sharing:** (clockwise from above-left) Elders at the Nashville Ganesha Temple put on a theatrical performance; Bhutanese refugees, settled in Tennessee, are bused to the same temple for worship; youth in New Jersey participate in a local food bank, collecting food, door to door to feed the poor and homeless

## Voices: Should Hindu Temples Follow the Caribbean Model?

Pandit Roopnauth Sharma, born in a priestly family in Guyana in 1952, now a Canadian citizen, is founder of the Shri Ram Mandir of Mississauga, just west of Toronto.

HINDUS IN THE WEST HAVE COME NOT only directly from India but via diverse parts of the globe. Colonialism opened the doorway to the New World for the Hindu from India to transfer the ancient traditions of Hinduism to far corners of the world. Once this occurred, there started a gradual but unintentional reshaping of the basic functionality of the Hindu temple, different from that which existed in India, an evolution which continues to this day. These changes have been influenced by the



RAM TEMPLE ONTARIO

geography, climatic conditions, availability of religious materials, governmental con-

straints, lack of temple elements, religion, culture, traditions and practices of each new country.

One key change has been the Sunday congregational worship. Hindus have traditionally worshipped daily in their temples, not as a congregation but as individuals showing their devotion and seeking blessings of the Deities. Temple functions were historically regulated by the Hindu lunar calendar rather than based on the days of the week.

Sunday worship may be new to most Hindus in the West. But it has long been the common practice in the Caribbean, particular in Guyana and Trinidad where there are significant Hindu populations. In these countries the national language is English,

and all Hindus are fluent in English. Scriptures are recited in Sanskrit or Hindi, and then the message is delivered in English. The mandir has become not only a place of worship but the center of learning for the Hindu community.

This evolution seems to be the ideal solution for propagating and maintaining the Hindu way of life in the face of the threat of the Western lifestyle. Our Hindu institutions of worship must adapt some of the social, economic and business strategies of the West in order to sustain a rational approach to a meaningful and fulfilling life here.

Significant innovations that have already been made in some temples include the introduction of family counseling, immigrant settlement, career planning, youth

forums, interfaith dialogues, day school for junior and senior kindergartens, senior homes, senior social support services, senior recreational activities, community services, spiritual care and consultation services to government institutions such as correctional services and youth detention centers. These innovations should be fostered vigorously. The temple must become an institution of learning, a social support entity to all of its congregation and a representative of the community on matters relating to Hindus to all levels of government and other agencies.

There is also a great need to reinvent the approach of delivering the message of Hinduism to the masses. The traditional method of puja, satsang, katha and other forms of religious gatherings needs to adapt

and fully utilize current communication technologies. All pandits must strive to be competent in English and understand the Western way of thinking. They must also be encouraged to develop their presentation skills, as these are key tools in teaching and motivating the congregation. They should explain the significance of the ritual in a language understood by all in attendance. This gives credibility to the rituals and encourages the new generation.

Hindu temple leaders and community members must accept that we must change our approach in disseminating the tenets, philosophy and practices of our great religion. Otherwise, we risk the loss of our younger generation and the demise of the Hindu community as we know it today.



while other areas receive a fresh influx. The receiving organizations who initially help the refugees are often Christian. The funds they get for the program come from the federal government, and in theory any attempts at conversion are highly discouraged. But from the refugees' point of view, it is the Christians helping them.

This has been the first time the Hindu community as a whole has had a seriously

disadvantaged group of its own in need of help. Swami Svataavidyananda of Arsha Vijnana Gurukulam, Georgia, a speaker at the Priests' Conference, explained just how critical this help is: "I've spoken with a number of Bhutanese refugees and I know from first-hand information that they were told there were no Hindus in the United States, no temples and no places of worship and that they had no choice but to become Christians

if they wanted to continue receiving help."

In the US, the Indian community is predominantly professionals, with relatively high income and a notably low crime rate. Canada has accepted a far wider range of immigrants, and some families at the low end of the economic scale have encountered problems. A few Canadian temples, such as the Ram Temple in Mississauga, have worked with the police to help troubled youth.

## Treatment of Priests

Every temple has a program for training its new priest immigrants in how to function and navigate Western culture, though there are a few that provide little help in an effort to keep a tight control on them. Such temples usually have their priests stay in the US for two or three years only, hoping the men never achieve personal independence.

Priests are treated with respect at most temples. Programs to learn English are a priority. Another goal is seeing that they get a driver's license, allowing them to make their way to home visits, which are frequent and monetarily rewarding. Most are given time off to visit India. But we heard nothing of sabbatical leaves of six months or a year, as may be provided to clergy of other faiths.

Yegnasubramaniam of New Jersey commented on the issue of low income. "Some priests have a kind of complex that they are not treated on par with the mainstream people of the community. Many of their children, now settled in the US, marry into to other communities, either inter-caste or to a different Indian state, such as a South Indian marrying a Punjabi. This has become common even among traditional priests." Yegnasubramaniam said that, not surprisingly, few children of US priests want to enter the



priesthood themselves. He told of a priest who cannot find a husband for his well-educated daughter, even though she has a good job.

Toronto's Ram Temple launched a program two years ago to train young men and women who want to be priests in the Caribbean tradition. Pundit Sharma explained, "We're trying to develop them to the point where they see the Hindu priesthood within a North American context as a reasonably well-paid profession that they would want to join." Some may go to India for training. In

**Temple clergy:** Marepalli N.V. Sastry in front of the Shiva-Vishnu Temple in Livermore, California, where he served with numerous other priests. He is now at the Sri Satyanarayana Swamy Devasthanam in Milpitas, California.

practice, however, there is no working pattern for priests' children in the West to become priests. For the foreseeable future, the temples must continue to rely on bringing priests from India.

## What About Funerals?

One of the first events a new temple must learn to handle is a death in the community. The practical issues include finding a crematorium that will allow Hindu rites. It's a major theological issue that in India temple priests do not perform funerals, nor the subsequent sraddha ceremonies nine days and then one year later. A separate caste of priests performs these functions. In the West, however, most temples—including Toronto's Ram Mandir, the Texas Hindu Worship Society, the Dallas/Fort Worth Hindu Temple and the Ganesha Temple in Nashville, Tennessee—require all their priests to learn the rites and perform funerals as a condition of service, regardless of their particular tradition. [See Dr. Sabharathnam's explanation from a scriptural perspective on page 17.]

Dr. Yegnasubramaniam spoke of his experience at the Sri Venkateswara Temple and Community Center in New Jersey: "The temple supplied a priest for the funeral. Once done, the priest cannot enter the temple that day. The same rule applies when they conduct the yearly shraddha ceremony."

Some temples do adhere to the Agamic tradition in this regard. A trustee of the Shiva Vishnu Temple of Melbourne wrote, "The full-time priests employed by the temple are brahmins and are forbidden to do the funeral rites." Dr. Subramaniam of the Shiva Vishnu Temple in Maryland told us that initially they had only two priests. When one of them did a funeral, he had to perform purification rituals before once again doing puja. Now the temple has a dozen priests, including some

whose tradition includes funerals, so their Agamic priests—Saiva and Vaishnava alike—are excused from that function.

Dr. Doobay of the Vishnu Mandir in Toronto said his temple has a priest from North India who does funerals. "Our priests from South India do not. The Agama priests are not supposed to do funerals." Dr. Doobay has also tried—unsuccessfully, so far—to get legal authorization for an area where a proper cremation could be held outside, with a pyre to walk around as described in scripture. In England recently, a similar effort successfully established that a law thought to forbid outdoor cremation actually did not, if the cremation was held in an enclosure, which could be open to the sky. However, no one has yet set up such a facility there.



## Congregational Worship

In discussing the evolving function of Hindu temples in the West, two quite distinctive types must be considered: those modeled upon temples in India (the majority) and those set up by Hindu immigrants from the countries of the 19th-century Indian diaspora, such as Fiji, Trinidad and Guyana.

The indentured laborers who went to those countries did so with few resources and no connection back to India. The work camps they lived in had a meeting hall, which they utilized as their temple, setting whatever Deity murti they possessed in the front. There were priests among those who came, and they did their best to continue the traditions—not only in leading the worship, but also teaching.

Adapting to life in the work camps, these groups made their modest temple the center of the community—a place of mutual support as well as worship. The result was a temple that functions much like a Christian church, complete with Sunday lecture and communal worship.

Most temples we interviewed have occasional visiting lecturers. The Hindu temple of Minnesota has a weekly 10:30 Sunday lecture by Trinidad-born devotee Dr. Anant Rambhachan of St. Olaf College, by temple president Dr. Sane or by a guest speaker. The lecture is given in a hall downstairs, then everyone goes upstairs for arati at noon.

Dr. Rambhachan explained, "If you go to a Caribbean temple in the United States or Canada you'll find happening on a Sunday morning a structured, congregational form of worship with puja, bhajan, kirtan and also



**Temple tours:** (top) Dr. Sane speaking during a Ganesha festival on the Ganapati Upanishad; (below) the Hindu Association of West Texas

## Conclusion

Managers and priests in the West are having to chart their own courses. There are no on-line tutorials or experts back in India to reach out to. But it's working. Hinduism is thriving here. Each year more temples are built, while the existing ones expand—both physically and in the services they offer the community. The experiences shared here are offered in hopes they will help inform the development of others, as the Hindu presence in the West continues to evolve.





## PRIESTHOOD

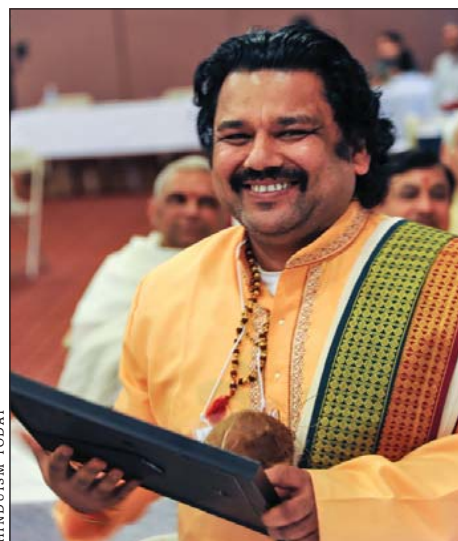
# Pittsburgh Hosts First Priests' Meeting

Pujaris and temple management gather to discuss challenges and opportunities facing the Hindu priests in the US and Canada: HINDUISM TODAY's analysis

OUR EDITORIAL TEAM DID NOT ORIGINALLY plan to fly 5,000 miles from Hawaii to Pennsylvania to attend the short (day-and-a-half) First Hindu Mandir Priests Conference, April 27-28, 2012. But a last-minute examination of the program convinced us we needed to be there. Thirty-two priests and 40 adult and youth delegates representing over 20 US and Canadian temples explored the conference theme, "The Role of Priests in Sustaining Dharma in America," from four disparate viewpoints: temple management, Indian priest tradition, Caribbean and other diaspora pandit traditions and Western-raised youth. The conference was a project of the yearly VHP-organized Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference and was organized with the local support of Pittsburgh Hindu Jain Temple and the Sri Venkateshwara Temple.

This is not a comprehensive report on the conference, but an examination of two key issues it addressed: 1) the employment and treatment of the priests and 2) the evolution of Hindu temples in the West as they move beyond the functions of the typical temple in India. Dr. Sheenu Srinivasan, founder of the Connecticut Valley Hindu Temple Society, stated the latter issue succinctly: "While we have succeeded in building temples with

attractive architecture and sculptures and staffed them with priests on visas, we have failed in the more important aspect of organizing these temples as centers of authoritative learning and spiritual support."



"Thank you:" Pandit Rishikesh Tiwari of the Sanatan Dharma Temple and Cultural Center of Maple Valley, Washington, receives certificate of appreciation

### The Priest's Lot

Pandit Chandrashekar Kashavajjala of the Bharatiya Hindu Temple, Columbus, Ohio, was given the task of enumerating all the problems faced by priests who come to work in America. In a good-natured manner, he explained the gulf between what the priests thought would happen in the US, and what actually did happen—the inspiration for our editorial cartoon at right. It was a rare moment for the priests to "get everything off their chests" before an influential group of temple trustees.

Chandrashekar's list of issues was extensive, including low salary, low yearly raises, poor housing, overwork and inadequate health insurance. In particular, the priests resented management's holding their passport—which is actually illegal under US law. Some temples have restricted priests from marrying within a certain number of years, usually two or three, after commencing work—and once they are married, temples have failed to provide housing for the couple or health insurance that covers the wife. Sometimes priests have been used as pawns in disputes between trustees, making them insecure. Finally, said Chandrashekar, "proper encouragement and appreciation needs to be given to the priest at a regular interval or

after performing major rituals."

Forty-three percent of Hindus in the US earn more than \$100,000/year. Most temple trustees are in this category, while the priests might be offered as little as \$23,000/year to start—a huge disparity. Several speakers explained the priests want to attain the same standard of living as most of the temple devotees—to be able to "take care of their families," including providing a good education

**Pondering priesthood:** Delegates to the First Hindu Mandir Priests Conference gathered for a group photo on April 28, 2012

for their children. A priest at Tirupati temple in India, one of the richest religious institutions in the world, earns \$3,600/year. He can be forgiven for thinking \$30,000/year is a decent salary in the US. In fact, it is barely above the poverty line—\$24,000—for a family of four. This income disparity was clearly an important issue for the priests, both practically and emotionally.

Such a disparity does not exist for Christian pastors, who are regarded in US communities as professionals on the level of lawyers or doctors. The average salary of a pastor is \$85,000/year as of 2012. He or she usually holds a master's degree and has extensive responsibility for the church's operation.

### The Temple's Expanding Role

In his keynote, "Elevating the Profile of Priests," Pandit Roopnauth Sharma said the priests should be key figures in sustaining the spiritual and cultural element of North American Hindu society. He urged temples to provide opportunities for the personal development and growth of the priests as a teacher/counselors, mandir executives and

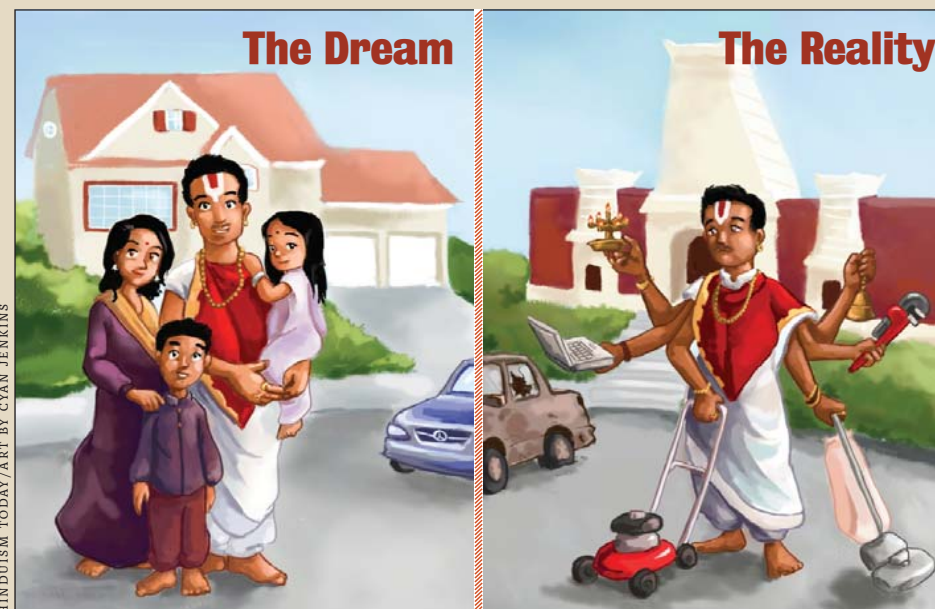
community leaders.

These various roles are required because, as you've read in the previous article, community needs have pushed temples into new areas of service, such as teaching and counseling. Pandits from the Caribbean, such as Roopnauth, have already been well trained to fulfill these functions. The priests from India have not been trained, and it was not at all obvious to those at the conference that they should be so trained.

On a spiritual level, the duty of the temple priest is to serve the Deity and perform the worship for the benefit of the community—the same task the priest's ancestors have done for generations. A priest may rightly regard any other duties as outside his responsibility. On the practical level, these expanded roles require a command of English many priests do not have, and which would take years to acquire. Some attendees suggested the priests become teachers of the youth and learn to lead the congregation in singing. Again, these are talents they may not have.

Expecting the priests to expand their functions into these areas is likely short-sighted and impractical. It would inevitably weaken their puja performance and add to their stressful schedule. A broader analysis of how to meet the needs of the congregation is required, balancing the skills and availability of priests, trustees, employees and volunteers. This analysis could be undertaken by the think tank that was proposed by the conference: the Hindu Mandir Pandit Sabha.

## Classified ad: "Position Available: Chief Priest, New Hindu Temple in America"



A QUESTION-ANSWER PERIOD IN THE CONFERENCE examined the gulf that has existed between the expectations of priests coming to America and those of temple management, especially for new temples. Sometimes the priest is the temple's only full-time employee, responsible for everything about the temple—not only the puja but also all the cleaning, lawn mowing, accounting and repairs.

High on the list of symbolic issues for a newly arrived priest is the car—just as for any American teen. Before arriving here, the priests envision moving about in a Mercedes. But they can't afford anything in that price range, at least at the beginning, and must settle for purchasing a low cost clunker.

The car can create other issues, as well. If it is too nice, devotees who have spent large portions of their income to build the temple may complain that they are paying the priest too much. But one priest was humiliated—true story—when a temple trustee asked him to move his old, decidedly unprestigious car from the front parking lot to the back of the temple, where it would not be seen!

The car issue does provide a benchmark: once the priest can finally afford a Mercedes, he knows he's achieved the American dream.





# Our Temple Builders: Hindu of the Year 2012

HTGC

## AWARDS

### Honoring the Ancient Shilpa Parampara

For the first time, our “Hindu of the Year” is awarded to a group: the temple architects and artisans who create these masterpieces of spiritual art

**W**E MAKE NO CLAIM TO OBJECTIVITY in taking this opportunity to designate as Hindu of the Year the architects and sculptors who create the magnificent temples of our religion. Our own Iraivan Temple project—the first all-stone, hand-carved Hindu temple built in the West—has put us in intimate daily

contact with the Shilpa Parampara for nearly three decades as the complex \$16-million-dollar project moves toward fruition here on our island home of Kauai, Hawaii. We know first-hand the knowledge, skill, devotion and work ethic that characterizes these artisans.

While showcasing the tradition's skills, the scale of Iraivan Temple is dwarfed by the stu-

pendous burst of temple construction by the BAPS Swaminarayan organization, especially the Akshardham project in Delhi. BAPS has not only carried on the existing traditions of northern India, but resurrected lost arts and motifs and melded ancient methods of construction with the latest technologies to produce temples in stone at an unheard of pace—

more than 1,077 in the past 41 years!

Central to the temple building tradition anywhere in India is the shapati: architect, designer, engineer, sculptor, construction supervisor and teacher all in one. Some shapatits specialize in the making of murtis (statues), others in temple stone work and still others in the concrete, brick and plaster construction of most modern Hindu temples. Contributing shapatits are experts in metalwork, jewelry and carpentry. Many shapatits are competent engineers in reinforced concrete. Most modern temples are made of this material, then decorated by sculptors working with plaster.

But the shapatits' skill is best showcased in the temple stonework. There is



HINDUISM TODAY



HINDUISM TODAY

**The dynamic lineage in action:** (left) The main complex dedicated to Sri Venkateshwara in Atlanta, Georgia, designed by M. Muthiah Sthapati; (top) Dr. V. Ganapati Sthapati (center) with Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami at the beginning of work on Iraivan Temple, along with Selvanathan Sthapati (second from left), Sundaram Acharya (third from left), and Shanmugam Sthapati (second from right); (below) Muthiah Sthapati with Bodhinatha Veylanswami at the consecration of the Siva complex at the Atlanta temple in 2004

### The Renaissance Award: Past and Present

**T**he Hindu Renaissance Award Hindu of the Year was created in 1990 by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, founder of HINDUISM TODAY, to recognize and strengthen Hindu leaders worldwide. This year, 2012, is the first time it has been presented to a group, the Shilpa Parampara, responsible for building the great temples of our religion over the last many centuries.

Previous awardees are Swami Paramananda Bharati ('90), Swami Chidananda Saraswati ('91), Swami Chinmayananda ('92), Mata Amritanandamayi Ma ('93), Swami

Satchidananda ('94), Pramukhswami Maharaj ('95), Satya Sai Baba ('96), Sri Chinmoy ('97), Swami Bua ('98), Swami Chidananda Saraswati of Divine Life Society ('99), Ma Yoga Shakti ('00), T. S. Sambamurthy Sivachariar ('01), Dada J.P. Vaswani ('02), Sri Tiruchi Mahaswamigal ('03), Dr. K. Pichai Sivacharya ('04), Swami Tejomayananda ('05), Ramesh Bhai Oza ('06), Sri Balagangadharanathaswami ('07), Swami Avdheshanand ('08), Swami Gopal Sharan Devacharya ('09), Sri P. Parameswaran ('10) and Jagadguru Sri Sri Bharati Tirtha Mahaswamiji ('11).





HINDUISM TODAY

no standardized granite, sandstone or marble block to work from. Every piece is different from the moment it is cleaved from the quarry rock. Each of Iraivan Temple's several thousand stones, including its multi-ton pillars and beams, is unique. The sthapati is responsible to see that all fit together precisely. BAPS temples are similar and have been described as "giant jigsaw puzzles."

Nowadays many sthapatins in South India are trained by the Tamil Nadu Government School of Art and Architecture in Mambalapuram, but traditionally the expertise has been passed from father to son. Almost all sthapatins come from the Viswakarma caste, known by various names across India.

BAPS, for example, is collaborating closely with the Sompura community of temple artisans in Gujarat, part of this same Viswakarma tradition. Virendra Sompura was architect for the Delhi Akshardham Temple, while C.B. Sompura (whose grandfather rebuilt Somnath Temple in 1952) designed the London Shri Swaminaryana Mandir. The temple building tradition suffered greatly in North India during the long centuries of Islamic oppression, yet still survived.

We are most familiar with the prominent subgroups in South India, who avoided Is-

lamic suppression but suffered under the British, for lack of patronage.

V. Ganapati Sthapati, based in Mambalapuram, traces his lineage through his grandfather Mahilavanam to Kunjaramalan Rajaraja Perunthachan, who designed and built the great temple of Brihadeeshwara in Tanjore in the 10th century.

Present-day sthapatins in this clan include VGS's young nephew Selvanathan, Perumal Sthapati, Shekar Sthapati (instrumental in building the huge Tiruvalluvar statue), Palanisamy Sthapati, the late Shanmugam Sthapati (who worked on Iraivan Temple) and Shanmugam's son, Santana Krishna.

Another clan is descended from Muthu Sthapathi. Now based in Kanchipuram, the family originated near Rameshwaram. Muthu had four sons, each an accomplished sthapati in his own right. The eldest, S.M. Ganapathi Sthapathi—working closely with the youngest, Shanmugam Sthapathi—established the Sri Sankara Silpa Sala in Kanchipuram, offering temple design and construction. The late Sattanadha Sthapathi, Muthu's second son, built the Rajarajeshwari Temple on Mysore Road, Bangalore, for Shri Tiruchi Mahaswamigal of Kailash Ashram. The third son, Muthiah Sthapathi, has de-

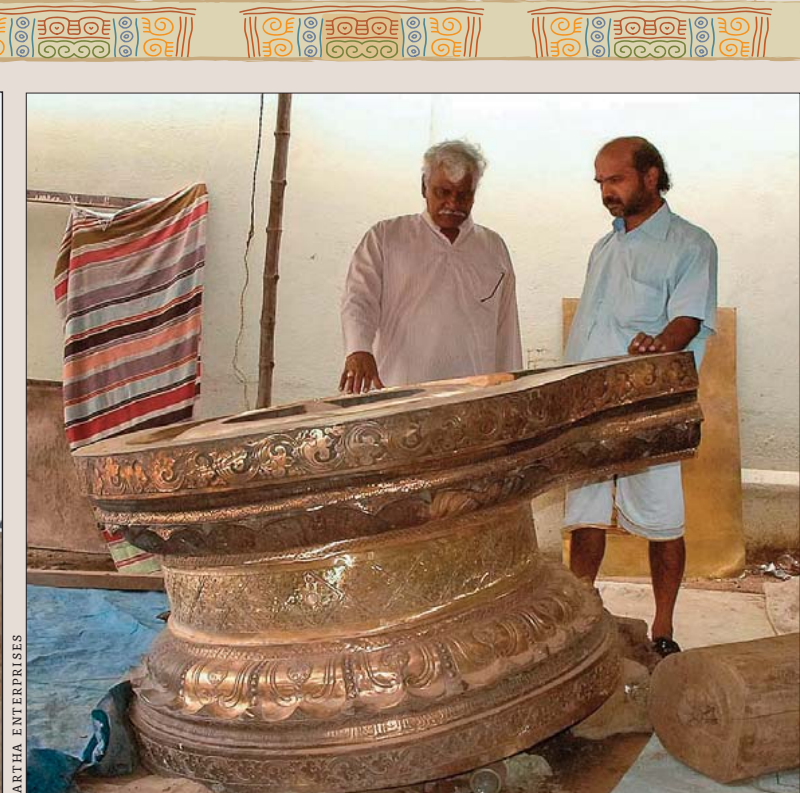
signed dozens of temples in the West.

One might ask then about the stone carvers themselves. Occasionally these days they are themselves from the Viswakarma caste, but more often are men drawn from the farming community.

A few years ago the US immigration service suddenly and unexpectedly stopped issuing the Religious Worker visa for carvers and plaster sculptors. Their reason? "They're just construction workers." After several months of correspondence, with the collaboration of other Hindu organizations and the help of high-priced lawyers and the office of Senator Kennedy, among others, that decision was reversed. We made a convincing case to the American government, based on scripture, history, academic research and the testimony of the shilpis themselves, that their work—however they came to it—was no ordinary job, but a religious calling, just as it is for the sthapatins. Perhaps not all approach their work with this attitude, but it is shared by everyone whom we know. For that, and for their central role in preserving and expanding Hindu culture in thousands of communities around the world, we honor our temple builders, north and south as our "Hindu of the Year" for 2012.



ZUMA PRESS/NEWSCOM



ARTHA ENTERPRISES

**Masters at work:** (left to right) Lord Swaminarayan enshrined in the central sanctum of BAPS Akshardham Temple in Delhi with its spectacular floor to ceiling carvings; lowering the five-headed cobra onto the entrance gopuram at Iraivan Temple; at K. Kuberan Sthapathy's shop in Swamimalai, Jiva Rajasankara (left) inspects the 10,000-pound base for Iraivan Temple's crystal Siva Lingam, created from the traditional panchalokam (five-metal) mixture of copper, tin, lead, silver and gold

## The Viswakarma Community through the Ages

**V**GANAPATI STHAPATI (1927-2011) was one of the foremost temple architects of his time, designing not only our own Iraivan Temple but spectacular works such as the Tiruvalluvar statue at Kanya Kumari. In the introduction to his seminal book, *Indian Sculpture and Iconography*, he wrote: "Indian sculpture and iconography is based on the *Shilpa Shastra*, an ancient text blessed by the Divinities and fostered by the hoary traditions of this land. The sculptural tradition in India, the *Shilpa Parampara*, is closely linked to the architectural field and the two together came to be known as the *Vaastu Parampara*. The designers and artists of the classical traditions of sculpture

and architecture were known as the Viswakarma, whose name has been mentioned in the *Vedas* and the *Puranas*. Even today they are known by this name, though there are regional variations.

"Viswakarma craftsmen and artists have been the designers of towns, temples, residences, villages, palaces, makers of sculptural works in metal, wood, earth-mortar and stone, jewelers, vessel makers, blacksmiths and makers of implements of war. To this day this community lives in various pockets of India, though sadly depleted in number and marginalized in its contribution to society. Traditionally, all skilled work connected with buildings and sculpture came under

their direct purview.

"The transference of knowledge has been hereditary, and the father's workshop became the learning ground for the son. But with the advent of modern educational patterns and technology their services were terminated in all works except temple designs and fashioning of art objects. It is only in the last two decades that a revival has taken place in the preparation and re-absorption of the traditional Viswakarma into the mainstream of social building activity.

"During the course of my research in the *Shilpa Parampara*, I became aware of the similarities and resemblances of the grammar, or order of sculpture, in

all parts of India, whether Karnataka, Maharashtra, Orissa or Bengal. We realized that a national tradition existed in our midst, which had been mistakenly put into contradictory slots due to variations in styles. The underlying principles and rhythms have evolved from a common and powerful base. In fact, the work methodology, measuring techniques, habits, ethics and material handling of the Viswakarma community show a remarkable similarity through the length and breadth of the whole of India. The Viswakarma have been one large united family, and it is their genius and creativity that has contributed greatly to the identity of our culture today."



# Ahimsa Can Save the Planet

Establishing nonviolence as the central principle in our relationship with nature is the key to an effective and lasting environmental movement

BY PANKAJ JAIN

FOR OBSERVANT HINDUS, JAINS AND BUDDHISTS, hurting or harming another being damages one's karma and obstructs advancement toward moksha, liberation. Mahavira, the last great teacher of Jainism, even proclaimed that ahimsa, nonviolence, is the greatest dharma. In modern times, Mahatma Gandhi is a shining example of a dedicated practitioner of ahimsa, advocating ecological practices which created harmony with nature.

When I mentioned this to my students recently, one immediately questioned me and asked if Indians in India are following the principles of Gandhi, and, if not, how can we expect others to do so? It is true that India and many other emerging nations in the world are enthusiastically aping the West with its ever-expanding economy and ever-shrinking natural resources. I was also asked two related questions recently at a conference on World Religions and Ecology: "What do the non-Western countries expect of the Western countries? If the rest of the world is eager to make the same mistakes the West did, what route should the West now take to ensure the planet's survival?" Perhaps one answer is to embrace Gandhi's ecological practices. If the West is to remain the intellectual leader of the world, the quicker it reforms and transforms itself, the better for our planet. So long as the West continues to crave more natural resources without changing its lifestyle, it will continue to lack the moral authority to preach to other cultures. It was the West that led the world with its modern scientific and technological innovations for the last several centuries. The West must now emerge as a new ecological leader, with Gandhi as the foundation of its lifestyle. All voices to save the planet's ecology are hollow rhetoric until that happens.

There cannot be and should not be a separate "war on terrorism," "war on climate change," "war on drugs," "war on corruption," "war on obesity" and so on. All aspects of modern life—our physical, mental, and spiritual health, the environment, the global security and international peace, social justice, and so on—will get a great boost if we first become nonviolent in our most basic activity: eating and surviving. "We are what we eat." This is such a simple statement and yet is so widely ignored all over the world. This is the way Gandhi lived every day, and his protest against the imperial power was influential because it was based on his own great life—unlike many contemporary activists whose own lives are nowhere close to Gandhi's.

Gandhi's entire life can be seen as an ecological treatise. This is one life in which every minute act, emotion or thought functioned much like an ecosystem: his small meals of nuts and fruits, his morning ablutions and everyday bodily practices, his periodic observances of silence, his morning walks, his cultivation of the small as much as of the big, his spinning wheel, his abhorrence of waste, his observance



of basic Hindu and Jain values of truth, nonviolence, celibacy and fasting. Gandhi's life and his dharmic teachings have inspired today's moralists, nonviolent activists, feminists, journalists, social reformers, trade union leaders, peasants, prohibitionists, nature-cure lovers, renunciators and environmentalists.

Despite all the recent advances in India's economy and consumerism, Gandhi's inspiration still thrives in modern India as an alternative perspective. Many contemporary environmental activists and dharmic leaders have modeled their lives taking their inspirations from dharmic teachings of India or have resisted the global consumerist pressure in various other ways. These include Sunderlal Bahuguna (now in his 80s, leader of the famous

Chipko Movement in North India); Medha Patkar (a strong voice against big dams in Central India); Dr. Vandana Shiva (fierce critic of Western-style globalism and capitalism); Anna Hazare (in headlines recently for his major protest against political corruption, also famous for his ecological experiments in his village in Central India); Pandurang Hedge (man who is leading Chipko-style movement in South India); the late Pandurang Shastri Athavale (with his global Swadhyaya Parivar); the late Anil Agarwal (founder of Center for Science and Environment). In addition, there are hundreds of smaller voices spread all over India, making India the home of the biggest environmental movement on the planet, according to Dr. Christopher Chapple in *Hinduism and Ecology*. There are also dozens of institutions founded by Gandhi himself in several Indian towns that are still flourishing with their own small-scale production of textiles and agriculture. Almost every Indian political party must use at least the rhetoric based on Gandhi's values whenever there is a discussion on taking technology or any kind of help from the USA, UK, France or other major Western power. Finally, several recent major Bollywood blockbusters feature Gandhi-like figures, reminding the audience of his message of nonviolence and civil disobedience.

Yes, Gandhi's immortal soul and other dharmic traditions of India are still vibrant even in the 21st-century globalized consumerist society. Several decades ago, in his nonviolent movement for civil rights, Dr. Martin Luther King said, "Christ furnished the spirit and motivation, while Gandhi furnished the method." It is time again to go back to these cherished values propounded by Christ, Gandhi and Dr. King. All three practiced and preached an absolutely simple lifestyle. All of humanity must now start to practice a simpler lifestyle, one that is nonviolent not just toward other human beings but also toward the entire Earth.

PANKAJ JAIN, PH.D., is Assistant Professor of Hinduism, Jainism and Ecology at the University of North Texas

## EDUCATIONAL INSIGHT

# Visiting a Hindu Temple

## A Beginner's Guide

Be they luxurious palaces, rustic warehouses, simple halls or granite sanctuaries, Hindu temples are springing up all over the world, numbering in the hundreds of thousands. Yet outside of India and a few places like Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bali, what happens inside these temples remains a mystery—to young generations of Hindus as well as to curious newcomers. It's all a bit intimidating at first. This Insight is designed to answer the common questions that arise: Why are temples important? What are the customs and protocols, the dos and don'ts? What attitudes should one hold inside? Do all those rituals have a meaning? What is the priest chanting? All these musings and more are addressed here to help newcomers—both Hindus and non-Hindus—enjoy and benefit from their temple visits.

**Brihadeeswarar:** A massive stone temple in Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu, built by Raja Raja Chola ten centuries ago and still vibrant today. The capstone, weighing 80 tons, is the largest in India.

This special Educational Insight was inspired by and produced expressly for the Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference





## Quick Start...

Dress modestly, no shorts or short skirts. Remove shoes before entering. Be respectful of God and the Gods. Bring your problems, prayers or sorrows but leave food and improper manners outside. Do not enter the shrines without invitation or sit with your feet pointing toward the Deities or another person. Refrain from gossip and worldly talk. Mute your cell phone. Treat the priests with respect and obey visitor signs. Men and women avoid hugging and other demonstrations of affection, and usually sit separately. Enjoy a spiritual time in this holy sanctuary.

## Why Are Temples Needed?

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

A few years ago at a temple in Australia, while I was chatting with sons and daughters of key members, one youth challenged: "Swamiji, since God is omnipresent, what is the need to build large temples to worship Him? The cost of construction is large, plus then you have the ongoing cost of monthly maintenance that has to be met. Couldn't all that money be spent in a better way?"

"Good question!" I responded. "Yes, it is true that God is everywhere, permeating everything, including this room. By looking intently around us, we should be able to experience God, right? But look around you now. How many of you can see God?" They all smiled and admitted they could not. I continued: "Practically speaking, God's omnipresence is at a very subtle level, too subtle for most of us to experience without a lot of experience in meditation."

That's how I explain the need for the Hindu temple: it is a special space in which the inner and outer worlds commune and we can experience Divinity. If we want to see a distant galaxy, we can go to an observatory and look through a powerful telescope. To see into the nucleus of a cell, we go to a laboratory and use a microscope. Similarly, to know God, we can go to the temple and experience Divinity through the sanctified murti. Temples are especially sacred for three reasons: construction, consecration and continuous daily worship.

Hereditary temple architects, known as *sthapatis*, are commissioned to design and construct the temple according to the sacred architecture found in the Agamic scriptures. Consecration occurs through the powerful ceremony of *kumbhabhishekam*, with many priests performing elaborate rituals for several days. Then begins the perpetual schedule of obligatory pujas conducted by highly trained priests. These daily pujas sustain and build on the power set in motion at the kumbhabhishekam.



## Hindu Temples Are Not All Alike

IDEALLY, TEMPLES (OFTEN CALLED MANDIRS) ARE BUILT IN accordance with the ancient scriptures, planned out by skilled Indian architects to resemble the traditional styles found in India. This ideal temple has certain features: 1) a central sanctum enshrines the main Deity; 2) other Deities in the pantheon are represented by murtis in secondary sanctums or shrines; 3) the structure has no basement; 4) cultural and social activities are provided for in separate facilities, not in the main area dedicated for worship; 5) trained, ordained priests perform a daily regimen of pujas (others do not enter the shrines); 6) the temple openly represents a particular denomination of Hinduism and a specific lineage of teaching and liturgy.

While these principles are well known among the thousands of communities of Hindus around the world, the reality is that each temple comes up in its own way, organically, with the above ideals flexing with the exigencies of the day, the resources and often mixed geographical background of the constituents. Hence, we now have a vast variety of temples, particularly outside India, each serving the needs of its community as a center of worship, culture, community service and spiritual fellowship.

Every temple is unique. Agamic temples provide elaborate pujas several times per day. The main Deities are in distinct, prominent sanctums. Individuals come and go at any time and worship privately or as a family. Other temples may be

**Sanctuaries for God:** (above) The BAPS Swaminarayana Mandir of Houston, Texas; (left) a priest holds the arati flame before Lord Ganesha at the Sri Manika Vinayakar Alayam in Paris

structured as a simple hall with a stage in front, and Deities on pedestals usually around the perimeter of the room. The style of worship here is often congregational, with temple members gathering at a set time for a structured service conducted by a priest or elder. In some mandirs devotees may do a simple puja themselves. Services may include some form of teaching, such as a lecture by a swami or lay leader, and devotional singing or dramatic readings from the epics, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*.

Here is the format followed at the Hindu temple in Midland, Texas, as described by Dr. Padmaja Patel: "Every week on Sunday we gather at our temple from 10:30 to 12:30. After removing our shoes in our shoe room, we enter the main hall. The men and women sit separately. There are a set of *shlokas* and *stutis* that everyone chants together, followed by bhajans, which are usually in the call-and-response fashion. At the end of the session, our priest will perform a short puja to a particular Deity. Then we sing a food-offering song, followed by the 'Om Jai Jagadish Hare' arati, where everyone can come forward. There are usually four or five arati trays with which people can offer arati to their Ishta Devata, or chosen Deity. Then we adjourn to a separate hall and enjoy the blessed food offerings as prasad."

Consult members of the community in advance to learn how best to prepare yourself to attend a particular temple.



## What Is Puja All About?

The Hindu worship service called puja, literally "adoration," is the central activity in most temples. Conducted by a priest, or pujari, puja is similar to a grand reception for a king. The ritual can last from ten minutes to several hours.

All puja follows one basic pattern. First, the pujari purifies himself, the sacred implements and the place of worship. He chants in Sanskrit the time, place and nature of this particular puja. Through hand gestures (mudras) and mantras, he beseeches the Deity to come and dwell in the image. Ringing a bell and intoning mantras and hymns from the ancient *Vedas* and *Agamas*, the pujari then offers precious substances to the Deity, including water, uncooked rice, holy ash, sandalwood paste and kumkum. Some rites include a ritual bath, called abhishekam, in which water, sesame oil, turmeric water, saffron, milk, yogurt, ghee, honey, lime juice, vibhuti, sandalwood paste, panchamritam (mixture of five fruits), coconut water and rosewater are poured over the Deity.

Devotees are seated during most of the puja, usually on the floor. After abhishekam, the Deity is dressed in new clothes and beautifully decorated with flowers. At this point, devotees may sing devotional songs. After decorating the Deity, the pujari offers incense, oil lamps and food. He offers flowers while chanting 108 names of the God. At the high point of the puja, a large lamp is waved before the Deity and bells are rung loudly as God sends His power through the holy image of Himself. When the lamp is lowered, everyone prostrates to the Divine. The lamp is then carried out to bless the worshipers, who often leave a donation on the tray (or later in the temple offering box). Finally, depending on the tradition, sacraments such as sacred ash, blessed water, sandalwood paste, kumkum, fruit, sweets and flowers are passed out to bless all present. These include a portion of the offerings—flowers, cooked food and more—brought by devotees. Devotees may then sit in meditation, basking in the blessings invoked by the puja.



# 18 Steps for Visiting a Hindu Temple

**Y**ou will want to look and feel your best when you go to the temple, God's home. Prepare yourself by bathing and putting on clean clothing. Traditional dress is best—saris or punjabis for ladies, long dresses for girls, and kurta and dhoti or pants for men and boys. But any nice, modest clothing suitable for sitting on the floor is acceptable. In anticipation of your visit, prepare your mind by thinking about God. Keep focused on your spiritual purpose during travel time, be it a few minute's drive or a long pilgrimage. If traveling with family or friends, direct discussions to spiritual matters and away from worldliness.

Bring an offering: such as fruits and flowers or flower garlands. On arrival, it is traditional to circumambulate the temple where possible. Inside, greet the Deities at their shrines, hands pressed together in namaskara, starting with Lord Ganesha. You may prostrate and present your offerings. Inwardly feel God's uplifting presence, called *sannidhya*.

The primary focus of Hindu temples is the worship ritual called puja (see p. 39). Puja is a ceremony in which the ringing of bells, passing of flames, presenting of offerings and chanting invoke the blessings of God and Gods. During the puja, focus on the acts of worship, rather than letting your mind wander. Over time, devotees strive to learn the inner meaning of what the priest is doing and mentally follow along.

Ardent worship takes many forms in a temple. You can be immersed in the joys of devotion, in prayerful communion, seeking consolation for a loss, singing hymns, chanting mantras or celebrating a rite of passage. Meditation is appropriate, especially after the puja, and emotion is not out of place. God will receive your devotion, however you offer it.

*Dancing with Siva* summarizes: "With offerings in hand, leaving our shoes outside, we enter through the *gopura*, or temple tower, wash hands, feet and mouth, and seek blessings at Lord Ganesha's shrine. Next we follow the outer *prakara*, or hallway, clockwise around the *mahamandapa*, central chambers. Inside we leave our worldly thoughts at the *balipitha*, or offering place, then prostrate before the *dhvajastambha*, temple flagpole, and worship Nandi the sacred bull [or Garuda, Mushika, etc.]. Next we circumambulate the central sanctum, *garbhagriha*, usually three times, returning to its entrance for worship. During puja, we stand with hands folded or in *anjali mudra*, though according to temple custom, it may be proper to sit quietly or sing devotional hymns. After the *arati*, or waving of the camphor light before the Deity, we prostrate (*ashtanga pranama* for men, and *panchanga pranama* for women) and rise to receive the prasada, accepting them in the right hand. We walk around the garbhagriha one final time before taking our leave."

## YOU ARE THERE

### 1. Worship at the Temple Gateway



As soon as you arrive, stand humbly before the temple entrance and raise your hands above your head in the prayerful gesture. Do this 3, 5, 7 or 9 times. You may prostrate here as well.

### 2. Remove Shoes, Rinse Feet & Hands



Remove your shoes (socks are usually OK, especially in cold climates). If a place is provided, rinse your mouth, feet and hands to purify yourself before entering the sacred premises.

### 3. Worship at the Flagpole



Many temples have a flagpole where one may prostrate and pray, and a *balipitha*, offering place, where negative thoughts are left. Then worship the Deity's mount, or *vahana*.

## WORSHIPING & ATTENDING PUJA

### 4. Pray First to Lord Ganesha



Worship Lord Ganesha, the Lord of Obstacles. By honoring Him first, the dynamic blessings of the temple will be opened to you.

### 5. Ring the Shrine Bell



Often there will be a small bell that you can ring to announce your arrival to the devas and Gods; its pure tones can easily be heard in the inner worlds.

### 6. Greet the Deities



Visit and greet the Deity in each shrine. The priest will often guide the order to be followed and explain the unique powers of each Divinity. Offer a flower to each.

### 7. Walk Around the Sanctum



Walk clockwise one, three, five, seven or nine times around the main shrine, withdrawing your awareness from worldly matters and directing it toward the Divine.

### 8. Present Your Offering



Place before the shrine the offering tray or basket that you prepared at home or purchased (they may be available in stalls near the entrance). Put love into your offerings.

### 9. Sit for Puja



During the puja, don't let your mind wander. This is the innermost time for reflection and communion. Devotees stand during the last part of a puja, and prostrate at the end.



## RECEIVING THE PUJA SACRAMENTS

### 10. The Arati Flame



When the priest holds the lamp in front of you after puja, pass your open hands through the flame three times, then lightly touching your eyes each time to draw the blessings into you.

### 11. Holy Ash



Accept the ash in your right hand (as with all offerings). Transfer it to your left hand, then use the right hand to apply it to your forehead. Ash symbolizes the burning away of impurity.

### 12. Blessed Water



The priest will place a small spoonful of blessed water or milk into your cupped right hand. Bring your hand up to your mouth and sip it.

### 13. Sandalwood Paste & Kumkum



Fragrant sandalwood paste is then given, followed by red powder. Apply a dot of these in the middle of your brow with your right ring finger. (See details in the sidebar to the right).

### 14. Prasada and a Flower



Blessed food (prasada) may then be given, such as a piece of fruit, a sweet or a spoonful of cooked food. Lastly, one may receive a flower that was offered to the Deity.

### 15. Monetary Offerings



It is customary to leave a monetary offering in the temple donation box. In addition, a donation may be placed on the arati tray to support the priests and their families.

## AFTER THE CEREMONY

### 16. Singing Bhajan



Singing is a superb way to express love and devotion. Bhajans and other hymns can be sung during the puja when the curtain is closed, or later on, by yourself or with a group.

### 17. Japa and Meditation



After the puja, sit quietly and meditate on the Divinity within yourself. This is an ideal time for japa, mentally repeating your mantra while counting on a strand of beads.

### 18. Archana for Personal Blessings



Archana is a personalized puja in which the priest recites to the Deity your name, lineage and birth star. To receive an archana, you pay a small fee and present an offering basket.

## About Sacraments

At the end of the puja, the priest passes out to the attending devotees various substances that were offered to the Deity. By partaking of these offerings, called prasada, one absorbs the blessings into one's being. Observe the way experienced temple-goers receive these sacraments to properly learn the nuanced customs.

First, the sacramental lamp which has just been offered at the high point of the puja is passed among the devotees. The devas can see and bless you through this flame as it lights up your face. Sometimes you, too, can glimpse into their world. When the priest comes to you with the lamp, reach out and pass both hands devoutly over the flame. Then bring your hands back, turn your palms toward your face and touch your eyes with your fingertips to receive the Deity's blessings. (In some temples, the devotees take turns passing the arati flame in front of the murtis while singing "Jai Jagadish Hare....")

At a shrine to Lord Vishnu, the priest may bring out the Deity's silver or gold crown and lightly touch it to the head of each devotee. This represents God's feet being placed on your head. A sacrament offered at Siva shrines is holy ash, *vibhuti*, made by burning dried cow dung with ghee, flowers, yogurt and other ingredients. It symbolizes the purity we attain by burning the bonds of ego, karma and maya to reveal the soul's natural goodness. It is applied on the forehead, generally three broad stripes for men, and one short stroke for ladies. A spoonful of blessed water that was offered to the Deity, or milk with which the Deity was bathed during the puja, may be offered for you to drink.

Sandalwood paste, valued for its fragrance, is often next. A small dab is placed in your hand by the priest, which you transfer to your left palm with a wiping motion. Dip your right ring finger into the paste and apply it with a small circular motion between the eyebrows, or in your chosen sectarian mark. A red powder called kumkum is then given. The priest will place a small pinch in your right hand or invite you to take some from the container he holds before you. Apply the kumkum on top of the sandalwood, creating a dot, or bindi, which represents the third eye of spiritual seeing. Vaishnava Hindus traditionally apply a V-shaped tilaka on the forehead representing the feet of the Lord.

Flowers may also be distributed by the priest, as well as cooked food. Many devotees wrap portions of their prasada to share with loved ones or place on their home altar.

## Did You Know?

All giving and receiving in the Hindu tradition is done only with the right hand or with both hands.





# Six Secrets About Temple Worship

FROM *MERGING WITH SIVA*, BY SATGURU SIVAYA SUBRAMUNIASWAMI

## 1. One God, Many Gods

In the Hindu pantheon there are said to be 330 million Gods. Even so, all Hindus believe in one Supreme Being who pervades the entire universe. The many Gods are perceived as divine creations of that one Being. These Gods, or Mahadevas, are real beings, capable of thought and feeling beyond the limited thought and feeling of embodied man. So, Hinduism has one God, but it has many Gods. There are only a few of these Gods for whom temples are built and pujas conducted. Ganesha, Siva, Subramaniam, Vishnu and Shakti are the most prominent Deities in contemporary Hinduism. Of course, there are many others for whom certain rites or mantras are done in daily ceremony, often in the home shrine. These include Brahma, Surya, Sarasvati, Lakshmi, Agni, Chandra, Ayyappan, Hanuman, Mariyamman and others.

The Hindu traditionally adopts an Ishta Devata. This is a personal Deity chosen from the many Hindu Gods, often according to the devotee's family background or the feeling of closeness to one form of divine manifestation. It is the unique and all-encompassing nature of Hinduism that one devotee may be worshiping Ganesha while his friend worships Subramaniam or Vishnu, and yet both honor the other's choice and feel no sense of conflict. The profound understanding and universal acceptance that are unique in Hinduism are reflected in this faculty for accommodating different approaches to the Divine, allowing for different names and forms of God to be worshiped side by side within the temple walls. It may even happen that one may adopt a different personal Deity through the years according to one's spiritual unfoldment and inner needs.

## 2. Temples Are Transformative!

Visiting a Hindu temple, receiving darshan from the majestic Gods of our religion, can altogether change the life of a worshiper. It alters the flow of the pranas, or life currents, within his body. It draws his awareness into the deeper chakras. It adjusts his beliefs and the attitudes that are the natural consequence of those beliefs. But the change is slow. He lives with the experience for months and months after his visit to the temple. He comes to know and love the Deity. The Deity comes to know and love

him, helping and guiding his entire evolutionary pattern.

Darshan coming from the great temples of our Gods can change the patterns of karma dating back many past lives, clearing and clarifying conditions that were created hundreds of years ago and are but seeds now, waiting to manifest in the future. Through the grace of the Gods, those seeds can be removed if the manifestation in the future would not enhance the evolution of the soul.



A couple walk barefoot in the precincts of the Sri Ekambaranathar Siva temple in Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu

## 3. Three Worlds Communing

Hinduism views existence as composed of three worlds. The First World is the physical universe, the Second World is the subtle astral or mental plane of existence in which the devas, or angels, and spirits live, and the Third World is the spiritual sphere of the Mahadevas, the Deities, the Gods. Hinduism is the harmonious working together of these three worlds. Religion blossoms for the Hindu as he awakens to the existence of the Second and Third Worlds. These inner worlds naturally inspire in man responses of love and devotion and even awe. They are that wonderful.

It is in the Hindu temple that the three worlds meet and devotees invoke the Gods of our religion. The temple is built as a palace in which the Gods reside. It is the visible home of the Gods, a sacred place unlike every other place on the Earth. The Hindu must associate himself with these Gods in a very sensitive way when he approaches the temple. These intelligent beings have evolved through eons of time and are able to help mankind without themselves having to live in a physical body. These great Mahadevas, with their multitudes of angelic devas, live and work constantly and tirelessly for the people of our religion, protecting and guiding them, opening new doors and closing unused ones.

The reality of the Mahadevas and their darshan can be experienced by the devotee through his awakened ajna



Denizens of the three worlds are often depicted, as here, on a temple's ornate towers

vision, or more often as the physical sight of the image in the sanctum coupled with the inner knowing that He is there within the microcosm. This darshan can be felt by all devotees, becoming stronger and more defined as devotion is perfected. Through this darshan, messages can be channeled along the vibratory emanations that radiate out from the Mahadevas, as well as from their representatives, the Second World devas who carry out their work for them in shrines and altars.

## 4. Where Problems Can Be Dissolved

Hindus always want to live near a temple so they can frequent it regularly. When we go to the temple, we leave with our mind filled with the shakti of the Deity. We are filled and thrilled with the shakti of the temple in every nerve current of our body. When we return to our home, we light an oil lamp, and that brings the power of the temple into the home. This simple act brings the devas in the Second World right into your home, where they can bless the rest of the family who perhaps did not go to the temple.

The devotee stands before the sanctum and telepathically tells the Gods a problem, and with hopeful faith leaves and waits. Days or weeks later, after he had forgotten about his prayer, he suddenly realizes the problem has disappeared. He attempts to trace the source of its solution and finds that a simple, favorable play of circumstance and events brought it about. Had the Gods answered his prayer, or would it have happened anyway?

He brings another prayer to the Gods, and again in time an answer appears in the natural course of his life. It appears to him that the Gods are hearing and responding to his needs. Trust and love have taken root. He goes on, year after year, bringing the Gods into his secular affairs, while just as carefully the Gods are bringing him into their celestial spheres, enlivening his soul with energy, joy and intelligence.



Devotees offer prayers in a temple in Bengaluru, Karnataka

The Hindu looks to the Gods for very practical assistance. He devoutly believes that the Gods from their dwelling in the Third World are capable of consciously working with the forces of evolution in the universe and they could then certainly manage a few simpler problems. He devoutly believes that the Gods are given to care for man on the planet and see him through his tenure on Earth, and that their decisions are vast in their implications.



## 5. Puja Is Communion

The physical representation of the God, be it a stone or metal image, a yantra or other sacred form, simply marks the place that the God will manifest in or hover above in His etheric body. It can be conceived as an antenna to receive the divine rays of the God or as the material body in or through which the God manifests in this First World. Man takes one body and then another in his progression through the cycles of birth and death and rebirth. Similarly, the Gods in their subtle bodies inhabit, for brief or protracted spans of time, these temple images.

When we perform puja, a religious ritual, we are attracting the attention of the devas and Mahadevas in the inner worlds. That is the purpose of a puja; it is a form of communication. To enhance this communication, we establish an altar in the temple and in the home. This becomes charged or magnetized through our devotional thoughts and feelings, which radiate out and affect the surrounding environment.

Chanting and satsanga and ceremonial rituals all contribute to this sanctifying process, creating an atmosphere to which the Gods are drawn and in which they can manifest. By the word *manifest*, I mean they actually come and dwell there and can stay for periods of time, providing the vibration is kept pure and undisturbed. The altar takes on a certain power. In our religion there are altars in temples all over the world inhabited by the



Priests bathe the five-metal parade murti of Lord Shanmukha at the Tirupparankunram Temple near Madurai in Tamil Nadu

devas and the great Gods. When you enter these holy places, you can sense their sanctity. You can feel the presence of these divine beings, and this radiation from them is known as darshan.

## 6. Dealing with Disbelief

In the beginning stages of worship, a Hindu soul may have to wrestle with disbelief in the Gods. He may wonder whether they really exist, especially if his own intuition is obscured by assimilation of Western, existentialist beliefs and attitudes. Yet, he senses their existence, and this sensing brings him back to the temple. He is looking for proof, immersed in the process of coming to know the Gods for himself. He is heartened and assured by hundreds of saints and rishis who have fathomed and found close and enduring relationships with the Gods, and who then extolled their greatness in pages of scripture and chronicle.

The Gods of Hinduism create, preserve and protect mankind. Their overview spans time itself, and yet their detailed focus upon the complicated fabric of human affairs is just as awesome. It is through their sanction that all things continue, and through their will that they cease. It is through their grace that all good things happen, and all things that happen are for the good. Now, you may wonder why one would put himself under this divine authority so willingly, thus losing his semblance of freedom. But does one not willingly put himself in total harmony with those whom he loves? Of course he does. And loving these great souls comes so naturally. Their timeless wisdom, their vast



Seeking blessings, pilgrims reverently touch the sculpted stone feet of Lord Vishnu in Tirumala Temple's Srivari Padalu shrine

intelligence, their thoroughly benign natures, their ceaseless concern for the problems and well-being of devotees, and their power and sheer godly brilliance—all these inspire our love.



## Other Temple Events

### Annual Festivals

Many annual festivals are celebrated in temples. These are auspicious days when the veil between the worlds is thin and God and the Gods can touch our world. Festivals provide the opportunity to go on pilgrimage, journeying to a far-off temple for blessings and renewal. Celebrated with unmatched fervor but with paced regularity, festivals serve as a reminder of one's identity and allegiance to Hindu traditions and ideals. As Professor Dr. Shiva Bajpai remarked, "Festivals, pilgrimages and temple worship are the faith armor of Hindus."



### Rites of Passage

A central part of every Hindu's life, *samskaras* are sacred rites of passage, such as coming of age and marriage, and childhood rites, including name-giving, first feeding, ear-piercing and head-shaving. They are held in temples, homes or halls. You may observe samskaras in progress during your visit. Consult with the temple priest for more information. These rites usually include a puja and a homa, or fire ceremony. If you request a samskara, the priest will set an auspicious time, explain how to prepare, what to bring, and what to do during the ceremony.



### Fire Rites

Major pujas in temples are often preceded by a *homa*, or "fire-offering," among the most ancient forms of Hindu worship. Fire is the object of worship, and oblations are offered into a sanctified fire pit, which is usually made of earthen bricks. One or more priests sit near and tend the fire, offering wood, ghee, grains and dried herbs while chanting mantras from the *Vedas* and *Agamas*. The rites invoke the temple's main Deity as well as other Gods, such as Ganesha, Agni and Varuna.

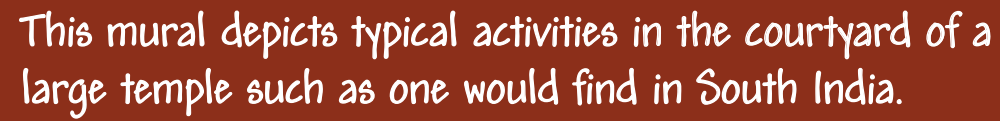


## Did You Know?

In a Hindu temple there is often a multiplicity of simultaneous proceedings and ceremonies. In one corner, an extended family, or clan, with its hundreds of tightly knit members, may be joyously celebrating a wedding. At another shrine a lady might be crying in front of the Deity, saddened by some misfortune and in need of solace. Elsewhere in the crowded precincts, a baby is being blessed, and several groups of temple musicians are filling the chamber with the shrill sounds of the naga-svaram and drum. After the puja reaches its zenith, brahmin priests move in and out of the sanctum, passing camphor and sacred ash and holy water to hundreds of worshipers crowding eagerly to get a glimpse of the Deity. All of this is happening at once, unplanned and yet totally organized. It is a wonderful experience, and such a diverse array of devotional ceremonies and such an intensity of worship can only be seen in a Hindu temple. There is no place on Earth quite like a Hindu temple.

*Living with Siva*





A young man prayerfully  
circumambulates the  
Murugan shrine.

A man gives coins to  
a group of sadhus.







## Questions & Answers

### What is the cosmology that gives rise to the belief in Gods and devas?

#### Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami:

Hinduism views existence as composed of three worlds. The First World is the physical universe, the Second World is the subtle astral or mental plane of existence in which the devas, or angels, and spirits live, and the Third World is the spiritual sphere of the Mahadevas, the Deities, the Gods. Hinduism is the harmonious working together of these three worlds. Religion blossoms for the Hindu as he awakens to the existence of the Second and Third Worlds. These inner worlds naturally inspire in man responses of love and devotion and even awe. They are that wonderful.

### What is the significance of the temple?

**BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha:** Mandir is the Hindu name for a place of worship or prayer. Mandir is a Sanskrit word meaning the place where the mind becomes still and the soul floats freely to seek the source of life, peace, joy and comfort. For centuries, the mandir has remained a center of life, a common community place where people forget their differences and voluntarily unite to serve society.

**Sivaya Subramuniyaswami:** On this Earth plane the Gods have a special home, and that is the holy temple. It is in the sanctified temple, where regular and proper puja is being performed in a pure way, that the Gods most easily manifest. You can go to a Hindu temple with your mind filled up with worries, you can be in a state of jealousy and anger, and leave the temple wondering what you were disturbed about, completely free from the mental burdens and feeling secure. So great are the divine psychiatrists, the Gods of our religion, who live in the Third World, who come from the Third World to this world where our priests perform the pujas and invoke their presence over the stone image.

### Why are temples needed?

**BAPS:** Every religion in its own tradition builds houses of worship. It is the mandir that fuels our faith in God, strengthens our society and teaches us to trust one another and to become trustworthy.



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**Spiritual culture:** (clockwise from left) A mother and daughter attend the temple together; devotees draw blessing from the arati flame after puja at a temple in Mumbai; a girl prays at a puja in Ubud, Bali

Schools will educate the mind, but who will educate the soul? Hospitals will mend a broken arm, but who will mend a broken heart? Cinemas and arcades will excite the mind, but where will one go for peace of mind? The mandir is a center for learning about man, nature and God. It is where ethics and values are reinforced. It is where people celebrate festivals and seek shelter in sad times. It is where talents in various arts—music, literature and sculpture—are offered in the service of God.

### Are there varied views regarding the Gods and temple images, or murtis?

Yes, from the Agamic perspective, the murti is considered a sacred medium of the Divine. Another view is that the various murtis are symbols of the facets of Divinity.

#### Acharya Ananda Swami, Pitampura Temple, West Delhi:

The sanctum sanctorum is the place where God resides. In Hindu culture, the idol is made based on the form of God which our rishis and saints saw through their penance and meditation. So, for us the idol is not just something made of stone; it is a form of God, a living God. These idols are established in the temples following directions given in our *Shastras* and *Vedas*. Once the idol is established with due rituals, that place becomes the garbhagriha, or sanctum sanctorum. To maintain the purity of the temple, only the priest can enter the sanctum or touch the Deity.

**Chinmaya Mission:** God, the infinite, the formless, is exceedingly hard to contemplate upon. Most of us need some grosser expression. Symbols of the eternal principle are called idols, murtis. These idols represent the eternal principle, God, the ideal.... If we are not yet able to see the Lord in everything, we are asked to first practice seeing him in at least one image and then slowly expand our

### Is Temple Worship Only for Beginners?

Temple worship is for all men and women at every level of spiritual development. Its meaning and experience deepen as we unfold spiritually through the stages of service, devotion, yoga and enlightened wisdom.

*Dancing with Siva*



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vision (*Bal Vihar Teacher's Handbook, Grade Five*).

**BAPS:** Sanatan Dharma believes in murti puja—worshiping Bhagwan, His avatars and Deities in the form of images. Followers believe in the presence of the Divine in such images and offer them worship with faith (shraddha) and loving devotion (bhakti). In turn, due to His grace, the Divine accepts this bhakti. Throughout Sanatan Dharma's history, He has let His manifestations and Divinity be known through various murtis and [miraculous] events.

### How should one prepare to go to the temple?

**Acharya Ananda Swami:** Devotees should come with complete mental and physical purity. In the temple the devotees should engage in bhajan, kirtan and worship of God. Before we enter the temple, we must purify ourselves by sprinkling of water and also purify our inner self by chanting holy mantras. Even our dress should be sattvic and light colored or even white. We must wear fresh clothes and avoid wearing leather items, like belts and shoes. Our heart should have sattvic feelings when we come to the temple.

### Why have many temples in the Hindu diaspora combined the functions of temple and satsang hall in one facility?

**Pandit Roopnauth Sharma, Ram Mandir, Toronto:** When people move from an environment they are accustomed to, they try to accommodate situations and in so doing may create a new approach to getting something done. When people settled in the colonial countries, they were given accommodations in simple lodges, and there was only one gathering hall. They placed the Deity there, did their puja there and congregated there for satsang. They held their havan there as well. But in India that would not happen. In the Caribbean it became a place for darshan and *shiksha* (teaching) and satsang because it was the only place they had, and this is what is evolving in North America today—like our congregation here in Ram Mandir. We are trying to create an environment where people come and sit and listen and learn, an institution not only for darshan but for spiritual learning, and learning about the Hindu way of life.

**Padmaja Patel, Midland, Texas:** In North America, in addition to temples of traditional South Indian style, there are many community temples which include a satsang hall and murtis. Our local temple falls in that category. To best utilize the space and money, we also have a stage in the hall for children's cultural performances. The current design serves our small community well. The other important factor is that some of the smaller communities cannot afford to have a full-time priest, so this type of non-traditional temple serves them well.

**Acharya Ananda Swami:** In North India there are also many temples where the design is such that the idols are placed inside a satsang hall.

### What is the purpose of walking around the temple or shrine?

**Acharya Ananda Swami:** There is a special importance of pradakshina (or parikrama). For different Gods and Goddesses there are different numbers of pradakshina one has to undergo. Most knowledgeable devotees undertake pradakshina as part of their routine of worship. The devotee can do general pradakshina for all the Gods, once, thrice, eleven, twenty-one, fifty-one times or even more.

**Sivaya Subramuniyaswami:** When we come to the temple out of the world, off the street, we are often shrouded by negative vibrations, which can actually be seen in our aura. Our nerve system may be upset, especially now, in the technological age, when we often suffer from stress and strain, the insecurity of so many changes and the rapid pace of life. In order to prepare ourselves to enter the sanctum sanctorum of the temple, the great mandapam inside, we walk clockwise around the temple very slowly. In this way we prepare our mind. We consciously drop off worldliness, letting the sufferings go, letting all disturbances leave our mind the best we can, and trying to reach deep inside of ourselves where peace exists eternally. We become as celestial as we can during the time we are walking around the temple, so that we can communicate with the celestial beings within the temple.



### How does the temple help individuals?

**BAPS:** A hectic routine packed with work tensions and idealistic ambitions, imperfect relationships and demanding family stresses, leaves the average individual with an ardent craving for answers to life's unlimited questions; the most burning being: "How can I attain peace of mind?" Sometimes the individual may turn to alcohol, substance abuse, crime, gambling or other such vices, helplessly in search of peace. Many genuine efforts are also made, such as recreational activities, days off or retreats. The mandir offers a refreshing tranquility. Through its natural teachings and activities of prayer and worship, the mandir generates devout faith in God and in fellow man and guides the individual towards spirituality. With this new-found faith in God, the individual embraces physical, mental, and spiritual purity. The teachings and natural activities of the mandir offer the individual an understanding that peace of mind does not lie in addictions and other such vices. They mold the character of the individual by endowing basic virtues of humanity such as fidelity, courage, forgiveness, unity, friendship, honesty, humility, tolerance, understanding, patience, charity and universal brotherhood. Thus, the mandir also plays an indirect role in improving society by improving the state of the individual.

### What is the significance of the showing of lights?

**BAPS:** Only through the light of knowledge can one welcome Bhagwan in one's heart. The symbol of this knowledge is light. Only in the light can one have Bhagwan's darshan. Arati is the ritual that welcomes Bhagwan with light.

**Acharya Ananda Swami:** Fire worship has a significant role in the temple. It is used in the puja and archana. We light the dipas and perform the arati in which the role of fire is very important. When special festivals or functions are held, dipas or lamps are lit 'round the clock.

### What cultural importance does the mandir have?

**BAPS:** Throughout the history of Hindu civilization, mandirs have been the most significant patrons of architecture, sculpture and painting. Mandirs were also great patrons of the performing arts, supporting the performance and teaching of devotional vocal and instrumental music. Mandirs also promoted a tradition of devotional dance. These traditions of music and dance were developed in the mandir and spread out into the wider culture. Without the mandir's patronage, these priceless artistic traditions would not be available for the world to appreciate today.



## Ten Tips to Make the Most of Your Visit

**1 Attend a puja at the temple at least once a week.** Experiencing the divine energy of God and the Gods on a regular basis helps keep you pure and strong in your religious commitments.

**2 Dress in traditional Hindu clothing.** This helps put you in a religious mood. Keep special clothing just for the temple.

**3 Make your travel to the temple a religious time.** This prepares you to arrive in a spiritual frame of mind. Don't focus on problems or projects at home, work or school. Don't think or talk about politics or business. Listen to religious music or chanting while in transit. Tell the children uplifting stories.

**4 Bring an offering.** Ideally, bring a flower, flower garland or fruit for each shrine at which you worship. The act of giving makes you receptive to blessings.

**5 Put prana into what you offer.** Prana is the energy that exudes from your hands. Buying a garland is good, but making one is even better. When the priest puts your hand-made garland on the murti, it's almost like you are touching the Deity yourself.

**6 Focus on the worship service and the priest's chanting.** Don't let the mind wander. Learn, at least generally, the meaning of what the priest is chanting. Similarly, when singing bhajans, keep focused on the meaning of the song.

**7 Stay for a while after the ceremony.** Don't rush away. Sit and meditate. Bask in the divine energy of the temple. This is also an ideal opportunity for japa.

**8 Light an oil lamp in your shrine room when you get home.** This brings devas who were at the temple right into your sacred space. From the inner world, they will bless the family and strengthen the spiritual force field of the home.

**9 Watch for auspicious days.** The Deity's presence is stronger on some days than others. By attending the temple on the most auspicious days, you become attuned to the Deity's blessings. For example, blessings are especially strong during the annual festival days.

**10 Gain strength by taking vows.** It is common to take a vow, or *vrata*, during festivals. A typical *vrata* is to fast during a day of temple ceremonies and break the fast that evening.

### How Do Our Prayers Reach the Gods?

Through temple worship, the three worlds become open to one another, and the beings within them are able to communicate. By means of the mystical arts of puja, the worlds act in concert, and prayers are received. Aum.

*Dancing with Siva*



A priest passes an arati lamp before a Shanmukha Deity.

## PHILOSOPHY

# Tagore und Einstein

## Two of the Twentieth Century's Greatest Minds Discuss the Nature of the Universal Being

*On July 14, 1930, Albert Einstein hosted the Indian poet-philosopher, Rabindranath Tagore at his home in Kaput, Germany. They had what has been called "one of the most stimulating, intellectually riveting conversations in history." Tagore documented this and other dialogs with Einstein in his book The Religion of Man, an edited compilation of his lectures at Oxford University in 1930. This conversation, excerpted below, has gone viral on the Internet, touching countless thinkers across the globe.*

**Einstein:** Do you believe in the Divine as isolated from the world?

**Tagore:** Not isolated. The infinite personality of Man comprehends the Universe. There cannot be anything that cannot be subsumed by the human personality, and this proves that the Truth of the Universe is human Truth. Matter is composed of protons and electrons, with gaps between them; but matter may seem to be solid. Similarly, humanity is composed of individuals, yet they have their interconnection of human relationship. The entire universe is linked up with us in a similar manner. It is a human universe.

**Einstein:** There are two different conceptions about the nature of the universe: (1) The world as a unity dependent on humanity. (2) The world as a reality independent of the human factor.

**Tagore:** When our universe is in harmony with Man, the eternal, we know it as Truth, we feel it as beauty.

**Einstein:** This is the purely human conception of the universe.

**Tagore:** There can be no other conception. This world is a human world; the scientific view of it is also that of the scientific man. There is some standard of reason and enjoyment which gives it Truth, the standard of the Eternal Man whose experiences are through our experiences.

**Einstein:** This is a realization of the human entity.

**Tagore:** Yes, one eternal entity. We have to realize it through our emotions and activities. We realize the Supreme Man who has no individual limitations through our limitations. Science is concerned with that which is not confined to individuals; it is the impersonal human world of Truths. Religion realizes these Truths and links them up with our deeper needs; our individual consciousness of Truth gains universal significance. Religion applies values to Truth, and we know this Truth as good through our own harmony with it.

**Einstein:** I cannot prove scientifically that Truth must be conceived as valid independent of humanity; but I believe it firmly. I believe that the Pythagorean theorem in geometry states something that is approximately true, independent of the existence of man. Anyway, if there is a reality independent of man, there is also a Truth relative to this reality. The negation of the first negates the latter.

**Tagore:** Truth, which is one with the Universal Being, must essentially be human. Otherwise whatever we individuals realize as true can never be called truth—at least the Truth which is described as scientific and which only can be reached through the process of logic, in other words, by an organ of thoughts which is human. According to Indian philosophy, there is Brahman, the absolute Truth, which cannot be conceived by the isolation of the individual mind or

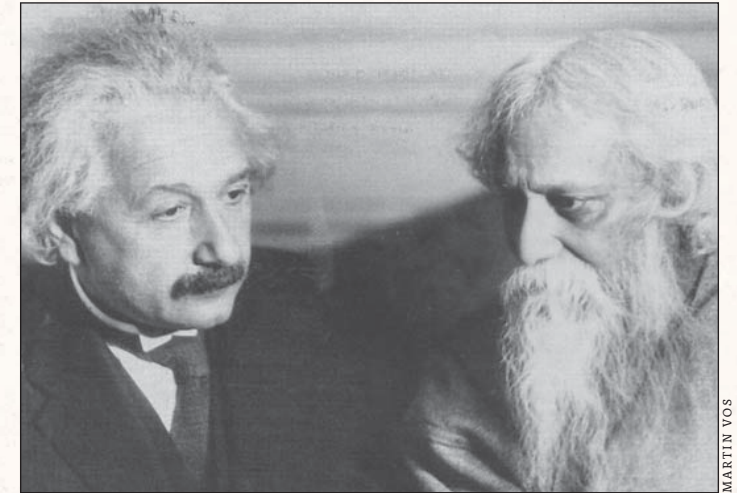
described by words, but can only be realized by completely merging the individual in its infinity. But such a Truth cannot belong to science. The nature of Truth which we are discussing is an appearance. What appears to be true to the human mind and therefore is human may be called maya or illusion.

**Einstein:** Even in our everyday life we feel compelled to ascribe a reality independent of man to the objects we use. We do this to connect the experiences of our senses in a reasonable way. For instance, if

nobody is in this house, yet that table remains where it is.

**Tagore:** Yes, it remains outside the individual mind, but not the universal mind. The table which I perceive is perceptible by the same kind of consciousness which I possess.

**Einstein:** If nobody would be in the house the table would exist all the same; but this is already illegitimate from your point of view, because we cannot explain what it means that the table is there, independently of us. Our natural view of the existence of truth apart from humanity cannot be explained or proved, but it is a belief



which nobody can lack, not even primitive beings. We attribute to Truth a super-human objectivity; it is indispensable for us, this reality which is independent of our existence, our experience and our mind, though we cannot say what it means.

**Tagore:** Science proves that the table's solidity is an appearance. That which the human mind perceives as a table would not exist if that mind were naught. The ultimate physical reality is nothing but a multitude of separate revolving centres of electric force.

In the apprehension of Truth there is an eternal conflict between the universal human mind and the same mind confined in the individual. The perpetual process of reconciliation is being carried on in our science, philosophy, in our ethics.

In any case, if there be any Truth absolutely unrelated to humanity then for us it is absolutely non-existing. For the moth which eats paper, literature is absolutely non-existent, yet for Man's mind literature has a greater value of Truth than the paper itself. In a similar manner if there be some Truth which has no sensuous or rational relation to the human mind, it will ever remain as nothing so long as we remain human beings.

**Einstein:** Then I am more religious than you are!

**Tagore:** My religion is in the reconciliation of the Super-personal Man, the universal human spirit, in my own individual being.



# Predatory Proselytism

The common concept of religious freedom fails to embrace the right to freedom from religious intrusion and exploitation. Let's change that.

BY PADMA KUPPA

I AM FORTUNATE TO BE ABLE TO VISIT MY FAMILY in India often—returning to the chaotic comfort that only one's family can provide, and reconnecting with the land of ancient rishis. But on recent visits I have noticed a marked increase in predatory proselytism.

*Predatory proselytism* is a term we use at the Hindu American Foundation to describe various unethical methods used in the attempt to gain converts. An ethical conversion is born of genuine faith, belief, study and/or religious experience that creates a true commitment to the new faith.

Several unethical, predatory conversion strategies are commonly employed in India and elsewhere. One such method is material enticement, in which humanitarian aid or economic, educational, medical or social assistance is offered on condition that the person converts. Another is denigration of the person's own religion in order to make the new religion appear superior. A third unethical, predatory method is the promotion of bigotry—knowingly and intentionally promoting religious hatred and even violence. Predatory proselytization tears apart the fabric of the communities where it occurs and has led to the annihilation of cultures.

Consider the case of the watchman and his family in my parents' apartment building in Hyderabad. When their young daughter was ill, they obtained medical assistance through the local church. Unfortunately, the assistance from this church (which has ties to the US) came with strings attached: they were asked to convert to Christianity. Not having other means to obtain treatment for their daughter, they complied. And now the church people come every Christmas season to be certain they are still Christian—the visible symbol being a lighted star hung over their home. Seethamma continues to wear her traditional sari, her *mangala sutra* (the Hindu symbol of marriage) and the red mark of kumkum on her forehead; but her daughters now wear Western clothing, seeking to be more like the Christians who converted them.

The family can still use their Hindu names, because they have not been baptized—yet. But the pressure is on: If they want the additional benefits enjoyed by Naomi, a neighbor who has been baptized, they must completely abandon their names, the festivities that link the community together, all the practices they have known since childhood, and even their understanding of the big questions in life. Seethamma and her family participate surreptitiously in the neighborhood celebrations of the major Hindu holy days such as Ganesh Chaturthi and Dasara, but Naomi dares not even try. In order to receive her monthly allowance, she receives visits from the church people to ensure she has not strayed from the Christian path and is not involved in Hindu festivities with her neighbors and friends.



Stories like these abound worldwide. In fact, the term "rice Christian" was coined to refer to people who convert to Christianity in order to survive, rather than from a genuine desire to embrace the Christian faith: Historically in Asia, some missionaries offered rice and other food items to people who agreed to convert to Christianity. This questionable strategy and other missionary practices are documented in books such as Arun Shourie's *Harvesting Our Souls: Missionaries, Their Designs, Their Claims* and Iain Buchanan's *Armies of God: A Study in Militant Christianity*.

## A Fundamental Human Right

The American Constitution, the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the laws of most free nations declare religious freedom to be a fundamental human right. But this right stands

compromised for billions around the world. Despite some efforts by the international community, the common application of the term gives the freedom to proselytize but does not recognize the right to continue in one's own tradition, free from predatory proselytism, religious intrusion and exploitation. In this way, current religious freedom policies tilt the scales of power in favor of exclusivist faiths, to the detriment of pluralist and non-exclusivist traditions. This imbalance has proven historically to foster interreligious tensions and violent conflict, religious imperialism and supremacy, terrorism and, ultimately, the annihilation of peoples, cultures and traditions that embrace pluralism.

## Perspectives of Many Faiths

Some American Christian theologians, concerned with issues of religious freedom, diversity and proselytism, agree that the understanding of religious freedom needs to change. Rev. Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, former president of the United Church of Christ's Chicago Theological Seminary, points out that religious freedom is perceived as a right in some parts of the world, but is a matter of identity in others. Rev. W. Eugene March, a Presbyterian and Old Testament scholar, advocates "the understanding and practice of genuine tolerance founded upon a positive appreciation for God's providential gift of religious pluralism" in his book, *The Wide, Wide Circle of Divine Love: A Biblical Case for Religious Diversity*. Rev. Gwynne Guibord, the Officer of Ecumenical and Interreligious Concerns for the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles, led the denunciation of historical and ongoing proselytism efforts by Christian missionaries as counterproductive to religious harmony.

A Hindu axiom is "*Ekam sat vipraha bahuda vadanti*"—"Truth is one, sages describe it variously" (*Rig Veda* 1.164.46). This under-

standing enables individuals to acknowledge that more than one path exists and that no one belief system or spiritual path is best for all. Hindu scriptures provide a set of blueprints for living harmoniously and synthesizing apparently opposing viewpoints—*dvaita/advaita*, *nirguna/saguna* Brahman, polytheism/monotheism. This framework is becoming increasingly more important as division and polarization rise at local, national and global levels.

While some people from other faith traditions share our belief in pluralism, others adamantly oppose it. There is little ground for communication when my friend Rev. Bob Cornwall tells me that for him and other Christians, "To not share one's faith with the intent to convert is an abdication of one's duty, and thus evil." When my colleague in interfaith work Rev. Dan Buttry, a Global Peace Consultant for the evangelical American Baptist Church, speaks against the violence that occurs when Hindus encounter evangelicals in Orissa and other parts of India, it is difficult to reply without becoming either accusatory or defensive. And I was speechless on hearing of my mother's conversation with a 17-year-old from Arkansas who barely knows the world, but is in Hyderabad to "save souls."

I ask such people to imagine someone trying to build a non-Roman Catholic church in the Vatican. A parallel situation actually happened several years ago: there was an application to build a Christian church in the Tirumala Hills, the home of Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam and the Sri Venkateswara Temple, a shrine sacred to millions of Hindus around the world.

## Scope of Modern Proselytism

Predatory proselytism fractures nations. In places like East Timor, Christians have converted people from their native traditions and then carved out new countries. In Northeast India and elsewhere, Christians have achieved or are near achieving a majority and are pushing toward splitting off as a new nation. When India sought to defend against unethical tactics by passing its Anti-Fraudulent Conversion Laws, it came under fire. Americans reacted by placing India on the annual Watch List of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF). India, of course, is the birthplace of four major religions—Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism; it is home to the third largest Muslim population in the world; and it has always provided safe haven to the Jewish people. Indeed, India welcomes all who are willing to respect others' beliefs and ways of life. Policy makers throughout the Western world should consider the context when questioning religious freedom in a country like India, where Hinduism has survived the onslaught of aggressive, supremacist faiths and nurtured religious pluralism.

Consider the plight of those offered "conditional help" in South India, Sri Lanka and Indonesia after the 2004 tsunami, and later in Haiti after the earthquake. In Aceh, Indonesia, missionaries from the Virginia-based organization WorldHelp reported that the catastrophe "provided entrance to the gospel" and that by placing tsunami orphans in a Christian home "their faith in Christ could become the foothold to reach the Aceh people." (This statement was later removed from their website.) In Haiti, tensions between religious

groups have increased after the 2010 earthquake, since much of the desperately needed aid was provided by evangelical groups.

This intimidation and exploitation of the most vulnerable segments of society is primarily rooted today in a surge of international conversion campaigns. In 2010 alone, Houston-based Central India Christian Mission proselytized to over 320,000 people and "converted" more than 19,600 in Central India. In October 2010, Joyce Meyer Ministries conducted a one-week medical outreach in Kolkata: over 2,200 people were treated and over 1,300 souls were "saved." At Source Light Ministries, 25 child evangelists and 100 "church planters" are trained monthly ([www.sourcelight.org/news/](http://www.sourcelight.org/news/)).

Grand Rapids-based Mission India argues that in India "superstition and idol worship have an iron grip—there is no forgiveness or joy." Such denigration of one's faith has a long-term impact on the psyche. It cuts families apart, like Edi's family, whose story is narrated here: [bit.ly/edis-secret-prayer](http://bit.ly/edis-secret-prayer). Moreover, the claim is false—*kshama* (forgiveness) and *ananda* (joy) are alive and well in India. But that doesn't matter to the missionaries; they're busy teaching English, raising money and counting converts.

Such predatory proselytism and the resulting unethical conversions that have been carried out for centuries around the world can no longer be ignored and must be prosecuted. Conversion campaigns, the majority of which are funded by American, Australian, South Korean and European faith-based organizations, deny respect, dignity and religious freedom to a vast majority of the world's people. More alarmingly, they are fostering deep and open conflict throughout the world. These campaigns are carried out by private citizens, but the diplomatic responsibility rests on the shoulders of the nations to which these individuals and organizations belong—as should the costs of dealing with the resulting conflicts.

These trends and issues are addressed thoroughly in the Hindu American Foundation's upcoming report on predatory proselytism and pluralism. We want to enable substantive policy dialogue and provide recommendations, with take-aways for individuals and communities. Here in the US, we invite support and encourage efforts to provide guidance for Hindu families in dealing with invasive initiatives like Campus Crusade for Christ, campaigns to convert the Bhutanese refugees living in various metro areas and other instances where groups seek to convert those in need through unethical means. We hope to reframe the dialog so that conversion efforts involving an imbalance of power are recognized as predatory proselytism, to positively impact the understanding of religious freedom and to promote religious diversity. We have reined in sexual harassment and school bullying. Let's curtail predatory proselytism.

READ THE HINDU AMERICAN FOUNDATION'S "POLICY BRIEF ON PREDATORY PROSELYTIZATION AND PLURALISM" AT [BIT.LY/HAF-PREDPROS](http://bit.ly/HAF-PREDPROS)

PADMA KUPPA is an IT professional in the US automotive industry, co-founder of the Troy-area Interfaith Group and a columnist for *Patheos.com*. Padma focuses on interreligious cooperation as an Executive Council member of the Hindu American Foundation.



Converted: Seethamma and her daughter Pramila outside their home in Hyderabad





SRI LANKA

## Keerimalai Rises from the Ashes of War

Siva Poomi Madham restores pilgrim services on the northern coast of Sri Lanka, reinvigorating the worship at an ancient holy site

BY RISHI THONDUNATHAN, SRI LANKA

**K**EERIMALAI, LOCATED AT THE NORTH-ERNmost tip of the Jaffna Peninsula, is one of Sri Lanka's ancient holy sites. Here is located the Naguleswaram temple, one of the nation's famed five Iswarams, all dedicated to Lord Siva. Others are Thirukoneswaran on the eastern Trincomalee Coast, Thiruketeeswaram on the northwest coast, facing India, and Munneswaram in the west, just north of Colombo. The fifth site is believed to be submerged beneath the ocean at Galle, off the island's southernmost tip. Eminent scholar and historian Dr. Paul E. Pieris says these Iswarams existed in Lanka long before the arrival of Vijaya (543 bce). Saint Tirumular, in his treatise on Saivism, the *Tirumantiram*, refers to Sri Lanka as Siva's land; and both the *Skanda Purana* and *Mahabharata* mention pilgrimages to bathe in the Keerimalai springs.

Keerimalai's freshwater spring flows from a cave in the rock face at ocean's edge, fifty feet above sea level. In ancient times a legendary sage with a mongoose face bathed in

the springs and his face was made human, hence the name *Keerimalai*: in Tamil *keeri* is "mongoose" and *malai* means "mountain," referring to the rock face above the ocean. Subsequent kings built a retaining tank for the spring waters. For millenia, Hindus of the Jaffna Peninsula have come here to disperse their loved ones' ashes in the sea and perform *antyeshti* for the deceased. During the new



moon in the month of July, known as Aadi Amavasai, Hindus from all over the island pilgrimage here to bathe in the Keerimalai Spring as part of a sacred ceremony honoring ancestors.

Before the civil war started in 1983, Keerimalai was a thriving complex with five major temples. Six established madhams, or rest homes, were filled with a constant stream of pilgrims. The samadhi shrines for great sages who did tapas here have inspired devotees through the centuries.

The war took its toll. Keerimalai was occupied by the Sri Lankan army, displacing local residents. Access for pilgrims was barred, and Keerimalai degenerated in neglect. After nearly three decades of devastating war, Keerimalai lay in ruins. Keerimalai's light started to shine again in 2012 with the January *kumbhabhishekam* of the Naguleswaram temple, held after restoration and rebuilding.

But the madhams that provided the important services of accommodation and feeding of pilgrims remained in rubble. Dr. Aru Thi-

ALL PHOTOS: SIVA POOMI TRUST



**Renewal:** (left) Siva Poomi Madham, newly renovated; (left) leaders gather to cut the ribbon and open the madham (left to right): Sri Muralitharan of Sivathondan Nilayam; Rishi Thondunathan; Sivasri Naguleswara Kurukkal; Sri La Sri Somasundara Paramachariya Swamigal, Nallai Aadheenam; and Sri Aru Thirumurugan, Siva Poomi

rumurugan, founder of Siva Poomi, was inspired to do more. He felt that if support for pilgrims was restored, Keerimalai's sacred traditions could be revived and preserved. Owners of the land of one madham transferred it to Siva Poomi Trust with the intention of bringing its services back to life. With the collaboration of the All Ceylon Hindu Congress and the support of many devotees, the Trust began reconstruction of the Siva Poomi Keerimalai Madham in August, 2011. I was blessed to be part of this project. On

January 28, 2012, we opened the building along with the head of Nallai Aadheenam, the chief priest of Naguleswaram and other dignitaries from the Jaffna Tamil community.

Once again there is a madham (if still only one) serving pilgrims to Keerimalai. It boasts a beautifully decorated facade, six rooms, bathrooms, a common hall and kitchen facilities. The first section, the Annadhanam (feeding) hall, is complete and in full swing serving the pilgrims at large. A second section will contain additional lodging for pilgrims; this is currently under construction, fully sponsored by the All Ceylon Hindu Congress. The whole project is a shining example of how organizations can come together to accomplish great things.

While the Naguleswaram temple and Siva Poomi Keerimalai Madham are up and running, the rest of Keerimalai's temples and madhams remain in ruin. Only time will tell if Keerimalai will degenerate into

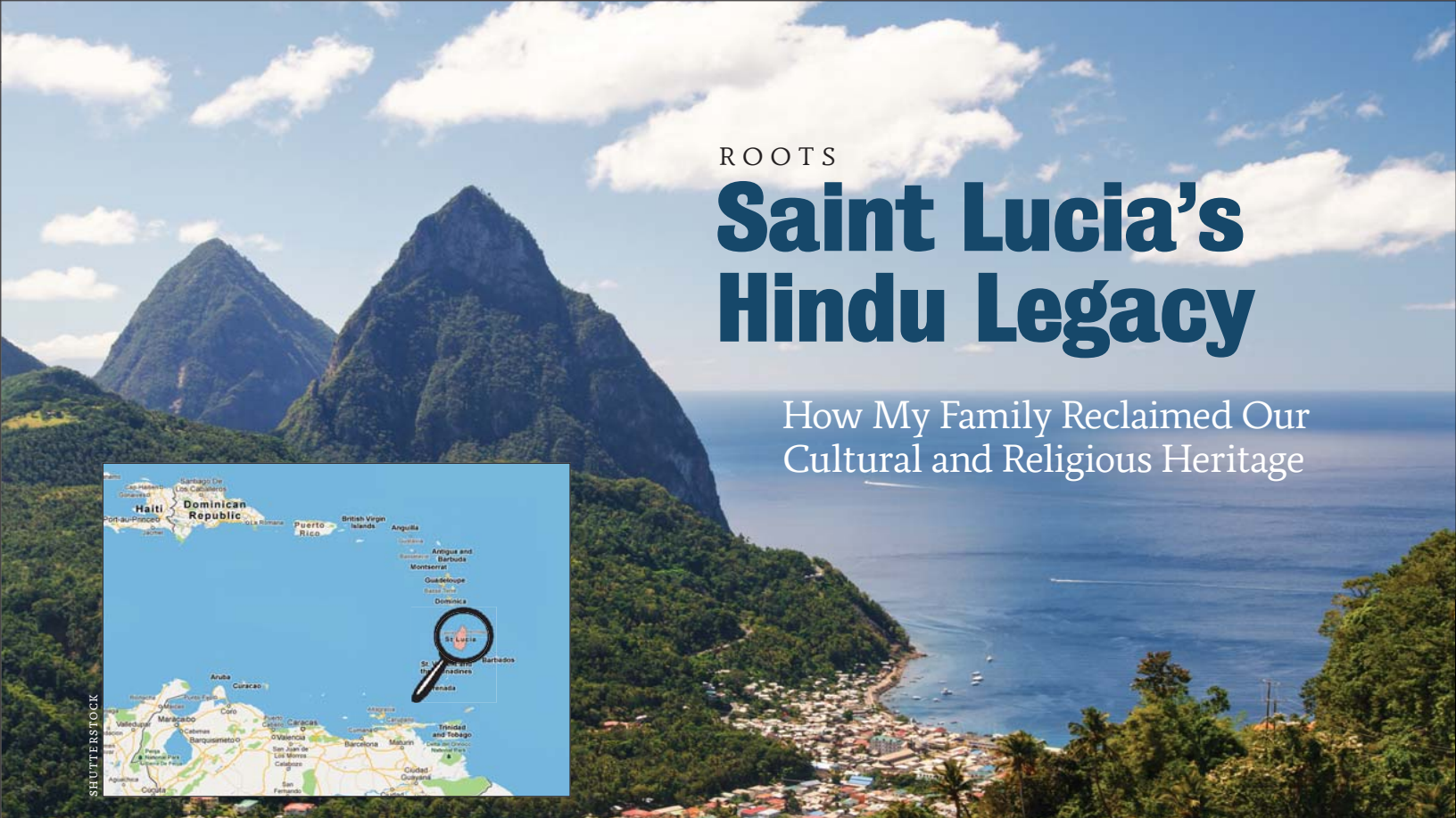
just another tourist beach resort—or if the waters of its sacred springs will renew the face of Keerimalai and raise it to its former glory. Restoring the temples and madhams in Keerimalai would ensure that it will always remain a sacred pilgrimage site for Hindus. Like the Ganga sites of Rishikesh or Kashi in India, Keerimalai could rise again as one of Sri Lanka's prime centers of religious and cultural tradition.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, EMAIL: [SIVAPOOMI@GMAIL.COM](mailto:SIVAPOOMI@GMAIL.COM) AND [HINDUCONGRESS@GMAIL.COM](mailto:HINDUCONGRESS@GMAIL.COM)

**Worshipful waters and war wreckage:** (left-to-right) a fresh water spring feeds the Keerimalai tank's healing waters. Ruins of the ancient and famous Sirappan Madham. One of Keerimalai's holy shrines, Kasi Viswanathar Temple, destroyed and abandoned.







ROOTS

# Saint Lucia's Hindu Legacy

How My Family Reclaimed Our Cultural and Religious Heritage



BY GAJANAN NATARAJ, SAINT LUCIA

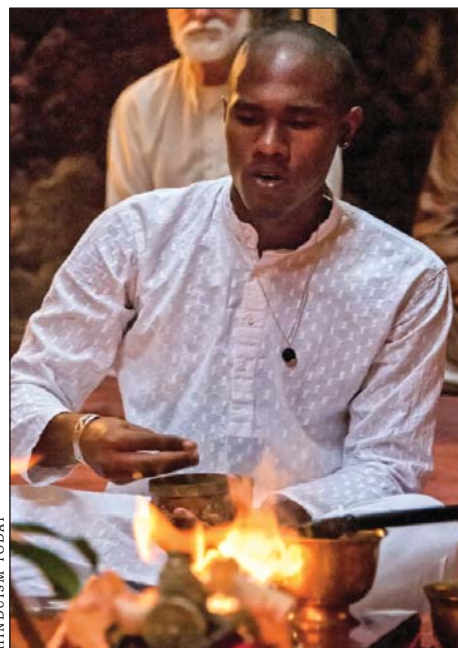
I AM A SAINT LUCIAN CITIZEN. I WAS BORN IN the US Virgin Islands and lived briefly on the mainland (USA), but for the better part of 23 years I was raised on the Caribbean island of Saint Lucia. I am roughly two-quarters Indian and two-quarters Negro—meaning both my parents were themselves of mixed heritage. This is common in Saint Lucia. We are called *dougl*a—which comes from *doogala* (“two necks”), a demeaning label meaning mixed race or half-caste in Bhojpuri and Hindi. In Saint Lucia, the term is sometimes used affectionately, sometimes not so affectionately.

Though many on the island are of Indian heritage, I am one of the very few Hindus. I have a Hindu name, perform daily puja to Lord Ganesha and consider the cow a sacred creature. I believe in karma, dharma, reincarnation, the divinity of the *Vedas* and in the need for a satguru to guide my spiritual journey. Of all the Indian families who came to Saint Lucia from Kolkata as indentured workers in the 19th century, mine is one of the few to reclaim our Hindu heritage. In being Hindu, I am almost unique among the fifth generation of Indian immigrants. Even among my close relatives, almost all are Christians.

How did I come to be a Hindu in a land where Christianity reigns supreme, even among Indians? I attribute my discovery of this beautiful religion to the interplay of my soul's natural calling and God's blessing of

being born to parents who are ardent seekers of spiritual truth. Indeed, my growth from non-religious, Christian-influenced spiritual confusion can only be credited to the marvelous journey of my parents.

It was really my mother, Toshadevi (Mangal) Nataraj, who never gave up her search for her spiritual roots and who eventually led my entire family back to the Sanatana Dharma. She is half Indian, in the fourth



HINDUISM TODAY

generation; her Hindu ancestors came to the island in 1862 on the second ship of indentured laborers. Raised by her Indian father, Reese Mangal, she was exposed to those few Indian traditions that were still practiced on the island in the 1960s. She remembers her grandfather, Gaillard Mangal, as tall and dark, always singing bhajans, even though he had a Christian name. Most Indians of the time were at least nominal Christians, a result of coercive strategies by the churches [see sidebar opposite].

Gaillard spoke the local French Creole, but also spoke some Hindi, as his parents were first-generation Indians. His wife, my great-grandmother, was given the Christian name Charlotte. She is remembered as a strict, light-skinned woman, quite serious about following tradition, especially the funeral rites. On the one-year anniversary of a relative's transition, she would make sure the family did the shraddha ceremony. A shrine was set up to the departed, their favorite

*Continued on page 58*

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**Past to present:** (clockwise from top) Saint Lucian's Pitons tower over the town of Soufrière; the young Reece Mangal (Gajanan's grandfather); Reece with 10 of his eleven children; Gajanan's mother and father; a group of 19th century East Indian plantation workers (these in Jamaica); Gajanan performing yagna in Kadavul Hindu Temple, Kauai, Hawaii, 2012

COURTESY MANGAL FAMILY



## Saint Lucia's Hindu History

SAINT LUCIA IS A VOLCANIC CARIBBEAN ISLAND OF JUST 238 SQUARE miles, originally inhabited by Amerindian tribes. In the 17th century both France and England coveted its natural harbor, Castries. They fought fourteen battles over it, the island changing hands after each one. The British won final control in 1814. Today Saint Lucia is an independent nation with a population of 176,000 and is a member of the British Commonwealth.

The Europeans had established sugar cane plantations in the 17th century, using slave labor. When slavery was abolished in 1838, the freed slaves refused to work the plantations. The British responded by bringing indentured workers from India.

According to Saint Lucian genealogist Richard Cheddie (whose name is likely derived from *Chedi*), thirteen ships carrying indentured laborers were brought from East India, with the first ship, the *Palmyra*, arriving in 1859. The Indians who came on these ships called themselves *Jahajis* (seafarers) and developed significant bonds during their journey to the Caribbean. Many of their descendants remain close to this day.

Cheddie's research indicates that when the Indians first came to British-ruled Saint Lucia, they were able to continue their traditions without much opposition from either the Christian British authorities or the Africans who had been converted to Christianity. The Indians wore traditional clothing, celebrated Deepavali and settled disputes using the Indian village panchayat system.

In the late 19th century, the local Christian churches began work to convert the Hindus. They realized, however, that Hinduism was deeply ingrained. It was more than just religious practice; it pervaded all customs, values and traditions of the Indians. A cunning and effective strategy was therefore crafted.

The Catholics ran most of the schools. They decreed that in order for Indians to enroll, they first had to convert to Christianity. Initially, this was resisted, but eventually many gave in. Securing work away from the sugar plantation required a formal education.

The convert was pressured to use his “Christian” name exclusively. As a result, there are many Indian clans on the Island with surnames

like Joseph, MacDoom and Ragbill. Many names also became Anglicized or Gallicized (made to sound French). As a result, *Bihari* became *Beharry*. *Shripal*, a name of Vishnu, became *Cepal*; *Kanhaiya*, a name of Krishna, became *Canaii*. Some names suggest a place of origin. *Ajodha*, for example, is from Ayodhya, the birthplace of Lord Rama. Other names retained their Indian spelling but were pronounced in an English way. So, a name like *Kadoo* was pronounced, “Kay-Doo.”

For a long time, a Christian priest was required for the name-giving process. As recently as the 1990s, some refused to register names associated with Hindu Gods and Goddesses.

Even more critically, according to Cheddie, “A couple married in the Hindu custom had no rights as far as the law was concerned”—the same policy Gandhi protested in South Africa. Moreover, those who had converted to Christianity were told it was now their duty to marry another Christian—a task complicated by the sectarian divisions within the Christian community

itself! Even clothing was a target, with Indians being required to dress “appropriately” for work, which meant no traditional clothing. Among those who remained Hindus, Cheddie tells us, traditions such as the telling of stories from the epics were discouraged. Eventually many Indians joined the Seventh-day Adventist Christian church, since its family- and community-oriented approach to religion reflected their own cultural values. Many remain members today.

Not only the English but also those of African descent scorned Indian culture in the early years. They ridiculed Indians as weak and uneducated—and continued to do so even after many had become wealthy and their children excelled in school.

Most Indians who came to Saint Lucia during plantation times either went back to India after their five-year contracts were up, or moved to other Caribbean islands with larger Indian populations. Now, 152 years after the first Indians arrived, the religion and culture have been largely eroded. There is little racial tension, mostly because nearly everyone is a Christian. A recent new influence is the arrival of many students from India to attend the local medical universities, as well as Indian entrepreneurs, doctors and technicians.



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foods cooked and left for them. Separately, the family would have food served on banana leaves on the floor, eating with the fingers—apparently the only time they would eat in this Indian fashion. My mother says the locals of African descent would sometimes mock these Hindu rituals.

One of my mother's vivid memories about her grandmother was the shrine she kept on the family land, with an oil lamp, a statue of the Virgin Mary and a small murti of Ganesha. My great-grandparents may have been devotees of the Goddess Durga, worshipping the Divine Mother through the image of Mary—an eclectic blend of Hindu religion and the imposed practices of Christianity. Every family member had an Indian name, my mother says, but these could not be used in school. Consequently the European names, such as Gaillard and Charlotte, stuck with them.

At age 11, my mother had to be baptized as a Catholic to enter the only all-girls secondary school on the island—the top performing academic institution, not only then but to this day. She says she never felt any connection to the Christian teachings. She often asked herself, “Why was I born half Indian—in a sort of limbo between the quite-different



COURTESY NATARAJ FAMILY

**Re-establishing tradition:** (left to right) Velika, Lily and Gajanan at Lily's ritu kala samskara (coming of age)

cultures of St. Lucian's Indians and Africans?” She committed herself to finding the root of her Indian heritage. She was encouraged by the example of my grandfather's sister “Joyce,” who had returned to India, settled and raised a family, and was living as a Hindu.

My mother left home at age seventeen to live in the US Virgin Islands with her mother, a strong woman of African descent. Even though a Christian, her mother had many books on yoga and Indian philosophy.

Reading those tomes, my mother slowly gained a new perspective and began to realize the beauty of the culture that her people in Saint Lucia had virtually lost. But it was difficult to find a path back to pure Hinduism. Again and again she was told the myth—even by some Hindus—that “you have to be born a Hindu to be a Hindu.” She eventually joined a universalist religious group, attracted by their worship—albeit Christian in nature—of Lord Ganesha, Krishna, Siva and the Divine Mother. Their core teachings included karma, reincarnation and yoga.

Meanwhile, my father, whose background had more influence from the African side, was on his own spiritual journey. In his search for truth, he joined a raja yoga group in Trinidad where he learned more about Hinduism. He and my mother eventually ended up in the same universalist movement, where their paths merged. Several years after they got married, they left the group and continued their spiritual search on their own.

Because of my parents' continuing quest, my two sisters and I were raised with an inherent acceptance of the basic Hindu beliefs, such as the laws of karma and reincarnation, as well as an understanding of the Supreme

God's ability to manifest in multiple forms. Therefore, we were never limited by the Abrahamic concept of “only one way” that pervades Saint Lucian society, in particular the education system.

In 2002, my mother discovered the teachings of Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami through his book *Loving Ganesha*. The truths of Saivite Hinduism appealed to us all and were easily understood and accepted. We had found our spiritual path, Hinduism, the Eternal Faith.

Satguru Subramuniyaswami had attained Mahasamadhi in 2001, but we contacted his monastic order at Kauai's Hindu Monastery (home of HINDUISM TODAY) and sought the advice of his successor, Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami. We then began formal study under his guidance.

In 2010 Bodhinatha briefly visited Saint Lucia and came to our home. The local Hindu community turned out in large numbers to greet him. Consisting primarily of Indians who had come to the island in the last thirty to fifty years, the Hindu community has always been welcoming and supportive of my family. They have assisted with our home ceremonies, including my youngest sister's coming-of-age ceremony, the ritu kala



COURTESY NATARAJ FAMILY

**Saint Lucians:** (left to right) Mom, Lily with Hindu friends from Guyana, India and Barbados—all now island residents

samskara.

In 2011, after several years of study, I formally entered Hinduism through the nama-karana samskara, the name-giving rite, on Kauai island in Hawaii.

In 2012, I came back to Kauai for the monastery's six-month Task Force program, which includes helping the staff of HINDUISM TODAY. That is how I came to be writing this article, with the blessings of Lord Ganesha, to shed some light on the

status of Hinduism in Saint Lucia and possibly many other Caribbean Islands.

Today I continue my studies of Saiva Siddhanta. I am working hard to become a formal shishya of Satguru Bodhinatha. My family practices Hinduism, and we adhere as best we can to all of the traditions.

Richard Cheddie said it well: “Imagine that the last shipload to arrive was only 112 years ago. There are still St. Lucians alive today whose parents came from India. There are a few that still speak some Hindi (Oudh/Bhojpuri dialects), some that still sing the old songs and some that still have knowledge to pass on. In my visits to Africa, the Middle East, Europe and North America I have seen much of the strength of many

people who have held on to their culture, some for thousands of years, despite what conquerors have tried to do to strip them of their beliefs.”

My name is Gajanan Nataraj, and I am proud to be a Hindu. I am proud to be Saint Lucian. And I am exceedingly grateful to be a Hindu man in Saint Lucia, with profound truths of culture, faith, philosophy and selfless devotion to pass on to the next generation of Saint Lucian Hindus.

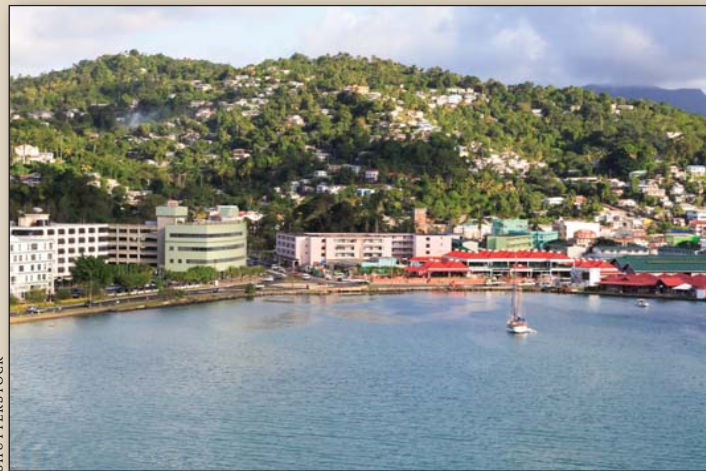
## Hinduism in Saint Lucia Today

BY GAJANAN NATARAJ, SAINT LUCIA

IT'S A SAD THING WHEN LITTLE RAVI AND NALINI GAJADHAR HAVE NO clue as to the significance of their beautiful names. They likely never heard the words *mandir*, *Sanskrit*, *Bharat*, *shanti*, *dharma* or even the sacred syllable *Aum*. They may have been told that their names are of Indian origin, but the Hindu element of this part of their identity has been virtually lost. This is the lamentable cultural condition of at least one hundred of Saint Lucia's present-day Indian clans.

Many Saint Lucians of African descent have come to realize that, while nothing is wrong with practicing Christianity, they were actually robbed of their African heritage, culture and most importantly, religion. Many have re-embraced whatever remains of African culture within and around them and now seek to bring back the ancient values and traditions of their motherland to their Western home in the Caribbean. Our Saint Lucian Indian families have yet to catch on to the realization that our heritage is more than just a racial or ethnic concept. It is also a spiritual wealth that all descendants of India should at least know of.

In spite of the apparent absence of Hinduism in its splendor on our little island, the Sanatana Dharma is still present in enticing glimmers here and there. Indians on the island are still very family-oriented at their core and generally take care of their own. Businesses are often handed down from father to son, just as was done in India before the infiltration of modern, individualistic Western thinking. The Indians have integrated quite well in society, overcoming the racial tensions between themselves and the Africans. Many “black” people can trace their roots back to at least one Indian ancestor, a major



SHUTTERSTOCK

**The city of Castries:** The island's capital and major port

factor in the virtual absence of racial tension on the island.

In recent years, some descendants of the original Indians, myself included, have shown a growing interest in reclaiming their heritage and reconnecting with Indian traditions. My friend and fellow Indo-Caribbean history enthusiast, James Rambally, has done a lot of work on the island to raise awareness of an “Indian Identity.” He has independently educated himself in long-lost traditions.

Recently a young local Indian couple opted to have a traditional Hindu wedding [see photo right] in addition to a Christian ceremony—possibly launching a new trend. It was inspiring to see none other than Lord Ganapati Himself on the wedding invitation.

An even more inspiring story is that of a local Indian woman who told me she had a vision of Lord Krishna telling her that He was God. She was deeply inspired, and although her friends and family members ridiculed her, she would not be deterred. She returned to India as a third- or fourth-generation Indian, studied and learned the beauty of Vaishnava Hinduism, then came back to Saint Lucia and married. She and her husband, of African descent, opened a Jaganatha Temple affiliated with ISKCON in the south of the island. Their story has always served as a source of inspiration for me.

There are a few other Hindu groups on the island. Devotees of Sri Satya Sai Baba have a local satsanga group that meets monthly, embracing all Hindus and even non-Hindus. The Sanatan Hindu organization recently brought a Hindu teacher from Europe, but it's rare for any Hindu leaders to visit our small island. The main way one can learn more about Hinduism is by drawing close to the small community of practicing Hindus—mostly recent arrivals from India.

The government is starting to take notice of this resurgence in Hinduism. In 2010, with the aid of the Brahma Kumaris of Trinidad, my family, along with two other families from India and Guyana, represented Hinduism at a government-sponsored “National Day of Prayer” interfaith event.

In exploring one's Hindu roots, one encounters the question of how to re-enter the religion. In school we're taught that Hindus don't



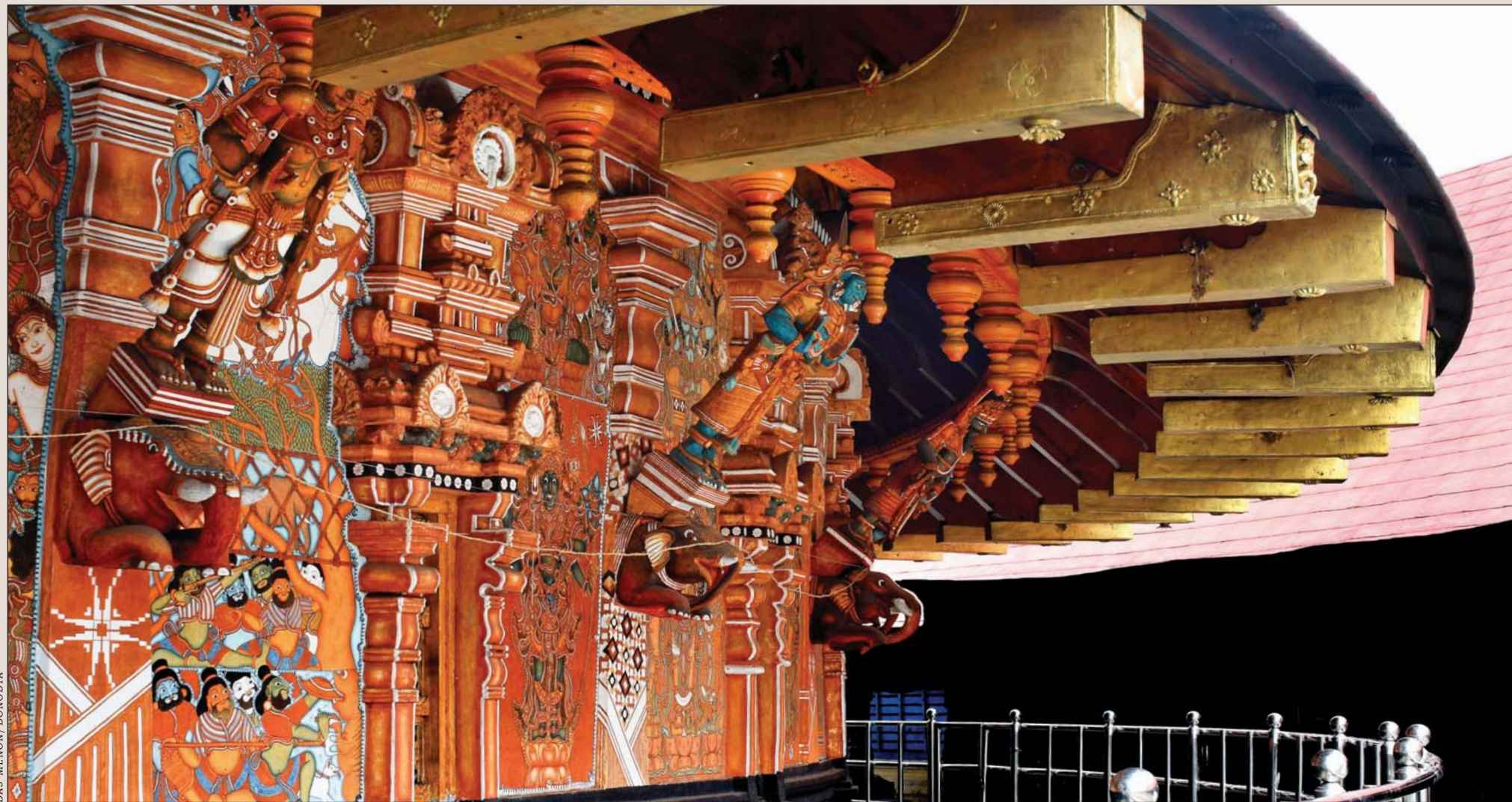
DECARLO PHOTO STUDIO

**Culture:** Local Indian family holds a rare traditional wedding

accept converts, and even some Indian teachers have said the same. I know now it is possible. In fact, organizations such as the VHP and the Arya Samaj actively convert people to Hinduism—especially those like us who come from Hindu ancestors.

I look forward to seeing more Indo-Saint Lucians courageously reconnecting to their Hindu roots. Maybe in the years to come, the large Indian settlements like Forestière will be home to one or two Hindu temples for future generations who are drawn to the beauty of their Indian/Hindu heritage.





DAS MENON/DONODIA



DAS MENON/DONODIA

# Kerala's Mural Treasures

**Divine artistry:** (left) Elaborate murals adorn every square millimeter of the circular sanctum at Vaikom Siva Temple; (above) Vishnu in repose at the Ettumanoor Mahadevar Temple

## Mural Art Around the Globe

Murals have adorned walls as long as there have been humans to scratch, paint, etch and carve them. From the prehistoric cave art at Lascaux, France, to the ceremonial wall paintings of ancient Egypt, Greece, Rome, India and Mesopotamia, the history of murals is rich and varied. The oldest mural communications, in Europe, date back 40,000 years. Preserved by the rocky shelters they inhabit, they typically depict religious ceremonies, hunting scenes and food gathering. New ones are continually being created while old ones are being discovered and restored—such as the 100 BCE Mayan wall art in Guatemala, discovered in 2001. The function of murals varies from culture

to culture. In Tibet they are part of meditative Buddhist practices. During the Baroque period in England, Germany and France, royalty and rich patrons had allegorical and Biblical murals lavishly painted on palace walls and ceilings. In modern urban environments from Berlin to Brooklyn, graffiti has become a form of mural art exhibiting the angst, rebellion and narratives of disenfranchised city youth. From China to Russia and from New York to Milan, wall art has been used to spread political propaganda and, in counterpoint, to perpetuate the culture of mass consumerism. Chairman Mao and Calvin Klein alike have found the mural to be greatly useful and profitable!

ART

## New Indian wealth spurs renaissance of remarkable wall-painting tradition

By G.K. NAIR, KERALA

FOR DECADES THE GREAT TRADITION OF mural painting in the South Indian state of Kerala stood on the precipice of extinction. It was old stuff, museum stuff, Keralites thought, and ready to recycle. Who would miss it, anyway? Turns out, lots of people. The art that inspired kings and temple priests for thousands of years has been resuscitated, this time by wealthy

individuals and corporations who recognize its genius and can pay for the privilege. This is one of the unexpected perks of India's economic resurgence. Huge mural paintings, once found only on the walls of temples and palaces, now adorn five-star hotel lobbies and the homes of India's rich and famous—with 55 billionaires, India ranks fourth in the world. Art lovers are motivated by aesthetic value, but others purchase art as a status

symbol. It's cool to be a connoisseur.

### Golden Age

Kerala's murals stand tall in India's artistic history, with their technical excellence, spiritualized storytelling, bold strokes, bright colors and uniquely idealized people, animals and trees. Only the Indian state of Rajasthan has more murals than Kerala.

Experts tell us Kerala's mural tradition

evolved as a complement to her unique architectural style, originating with the prehistoric rock paintings found in the Anjanad Valley. Archaeologists believe these paintings belong to different epochs, from the upper Paleolithic (before the last ice age) to the early historic period. Rock engravings dating to these ancient times have also been discovered in the Edakkal caves in Wayanad and at Perumkadavila in Tiruvananthapuram district.

Recent mural history can be traced to the seventh and eighth century CE. It is not unlikely that the early Kerala murals and architecture came heavily under the influence of the Pallava dynasty. During the 13th century the first frescos were created at Kanthaloor, Temple in Tiruvananthapuram district. From

then to the sixteenth century, hundreds of works blossomed in palaces and sacred chambers throughout the state, a treasure trove of imagery depicting the many manifestations of Siva, Vishnu in His various incarnations and the beloved Ganesha.

Archaeological evidence indicates the most prolific period of mural art in Kerala began in the mid-sixteenth century. Many of the most exquisite murals were painted during the 15th and 16th centuries, when the second Bhakti movement swept through Kerala. That revival was led by great literary geniuses like Melapattur Narayanan Bhatatiri (1560-1646) and Putanam Nambudiri (1547-1640), pure bhaktars whose devotional literature kindled spiritual art. It is probable

that the leading names of the movement, like Ezhuthachan, Melpathoor, Poonthanam, the venerable sage Vilwamangalam and the eighteen poets of the Zamorin's court, were instrumental in reviving the tradition of religious arts in those years.

The finest illustrations of this period are considered to be the Mattanchery Palace panels, depicting the *Ramayana* and the marriage of Parvati, and the temple paintings at Thrissur, Chemmanthitta and Thodeekalam. Of all the ancient works, only two are dated: one in 1691 in the Pallimanna Siva Temple at Trichur, and a second in 1731 in the Sankaranarayana shrine of the Vadakkunatha Temple complex.

Srikumara's *Shilparatna*, a sixteenth



century Sanskrit text on painting and related subjects, must have been enormously useful to early artists. This treatise, which discusses all aspects of painting, aesthetic as well as technical, has been acclaimed as a rare work on the techniques of Indian art, the like of which has never been published.

### Decline and Resurgence

With the invasion of the Muslim warrior Tipu Sultan (1766-1782) and the later takeover of the Travancore temple trusts by the British (1811), wall-painting art fell out of favor in the 18th century. For 150 years it languished, and those who knew the art grew fewer and fewer.

It took a disaster to halt the decline. In 1970 a fire broke out in Guruvayur Temple, burning down the walls and obliterating the murals. Faced with replacing the masterpieces, temple authorities realized, to their dismay, how few competent mural artists were available. Only three veterans could be summoned for the recreations: Mammiyur Krishnankutty Nair, M.K. Sreenivasan and K.K. Varier. "It is because of them that we are able to enjoy the wonderful works of art in the temple today," said a devotee of Guruvayoorappan.

The incident awakened the Guruvayur



Devaswom to the urgency for revival of this traditional and uniquely Keralite art form. Driven in part by the prodding of Dr. M.G. Sasibhooshan, the Institute of Mural Painting was established in 1989. Today it thrives, offering a five-year course inside the temple premises (see sidebar this page). Institutions for learning and research in mural arts have also come up at the Sree Sankara Sanskrit College in Kalady, the Malayala Kalagram in

Mahe and the Vastu Vidhya Gurukulam at Aranmula. Mural painting is also taught in the Banaras Hindu University in north India.

Even local Christian churches, recognizing this revival and the importance of mural art in Kerala, have employed this art form to depict the Last Supper and other Christian stories, in the attempt to give their imported history a distinctively local look.

### Color and Content

The subjects for murals are typically derived from religious culture and texts, peopled with highly stylized pictures of the Gods and Goddesses of the Hindu pantheon. Other common subjects are rishis and sages, their exploits and those of kings and warriors, as well as royal attendants, processions and the significant events which define the history of

the place.

Dr. Subbanna Sreenivasa Rao, a leading writer on the subject (see his work at [Sulekha.com](http://Sulekha.com)) told us, "The human and the godly figures depicted in Kerala murals are strong and voluminous, drawn in running, smooth curves and subtle darkening of colors. The exquisite shading depicts the fullness and roundness of their form, resembling the

## Against All Odds: Keeping the Tradition Alive

When a temple fire destroyed historic wall masterpieces and only three living artists could be found, the Guruvayur Temple Devaswom Board founded the first school for muralists in 1989. Today dozens of youth live and work at the Sri Krishna Temple complex, preparing plasters, mixing pigments and making brushes. Funded by the government temple board, the five-year course hand-picks students showing extraordinary aptitude and provides them room and board and Rs. 500 a month for personal expenses. The rooms are austere pilgrim quarters and the food is the bare-bones free meal, called *prasadam oottu*, which the temple gives twice a day to visiting devotees. In small classes, the mostly twenty-something boys are taken step



by step through a disciplined course under the rigorous tutelage of resident artisans.

In keeping with the spiritual roots of the craft, students bathe at dawn in the temple tank, then offer worship and prayers at the first puja of the day. This and other religious disciplines assure that the young artists regard their work as a gift to the Gods

and to humanity, an inner attitude considered crucial to attaining the highest levels of prowess and grace.

Sanskrit scholars are commissioned to teach the famed *Dhyana Slokas*, the hoary holy text which describes the Deities and legends of the art. The verses include exquisite descriptions of the *navarasas*, the nine

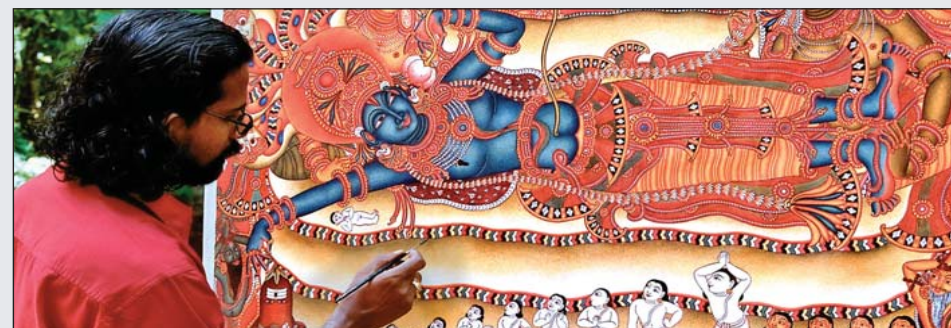
**Back to school:** Mr. Krishnakumar, principal of the Institute of Mural Paintings, instructs students

traditional emotions expressed by the face: love, laughter, fury, tragedy, disgust, horror, heroism and wonder.

The first class graduated in 1994, with Suresh Muthukulam (see page 67) ranking at the head, trained by Mummiyur Krishnankutty Asan, who passed away shortly thereafter.

Recently the Kerala government has added mural painting to its vastu science courses. The programs are much sought after. A gifted artist today can earn substantial sums selling through exhibitions. The best are earning millions of rupees a year.

## How It's Done: Murals in the Making



**The science of art:** (clockwise from facing page) Suresh Muttukulam's interpretation of an elephant bathing in a river; Kerala murals have a paltry palette of five colors, all hand-made from natural minerals, roots, oils and plants ground in small pestles with additions of neem oil and fresh coconut water; red is a mix of vermilion (mercuric sulfide); brushes are made from

the hairs on a goat's belly or from behind a calf's ear, or, if fine, from grass; yellow is ground from local minerals; lime and sand are mixed with plant juices and palm sugar to form a half-inch base, which is colored white with more lime and coconut water. The final stage is outlining the colored forms in lamp black.

paintings of Ajanta.

"The figures are highly stylized and rendered with elongated eyes, painted lips, exaggerated eyebrows and explicit body and hand gestures (*mudras*), decorated with elaborate headdresses and exuberant, overflowing ornaments. The strong and voluminous figures of Kerala murals with their elaborate headdresses have a close association with the characters from the dance dramas of Kerala.

"The expression of the emotions, too, comes out rather strongly. As compared to these figures, the animals, birds and plants drawn in the pictures appear closer to life. The wild and erotic scenes also are overtly shown without much reservation. The Gods, humans and animals are shown in combat and lovemaking. The murals take a holistic approach to existence, almost obliterating the thin dividing line between the sublime and the mundane, between religion and art."

These subjects are not fanciful representations of the artists' imagination but motifs exactly drawn from the *Dhyana slokas*, which are not mere prayers or hymns but word-pictures or verbal images of the Deities. These verses describe precisely the Deity's form, aspects, countenance, the details

of facial and bodily expressions, posture, the number of arms, heads and eyes, ornaments, objects held in the hands, etc. Suresh Muthukulam estimates there are more than 2,000 such verses which help artists like him to visualize and paint the sacred forms. These slokas also lay down the theory of proper color schemes, the skillful management of which provides stylized balance and rhythm to the paintings.

Murals depict the epics, like *Ramayana*, and the classic frolics of Krishna as well as the mystic forms of Siva and Shakti. They recount the Hindu myths and the Kerala forms of worship and lifestyle. As backdrops to these highly stylized works, flora and fauna and other aspects of nature are also pictured.

In his *Mural Paintings in Travancore* K.P. Padmanabhan Tampy writes, "The great and distinctive art displayed in these paintings reveals a wonderful vitality and intensity of feeling, meditative charm, divine majesty, decorative delicacy, unique verisimilitude, subtle charm of color, fine texture and marvelous draftsmanship. The Kerala murals blend harmoniously with their surrounding architecture, wood carvings and decorative art."

Unlike the temple wall-paintings of nearby Tamil Nadu, which relate to either Siva or Vishnu, Kerala murals present Siva and Vishnu rather evenly. There are paintings of Siva worshipping Vishnu, and Vishnu offering worship to Siva. Kerala especially adores the depiction of Siva and Vishnu as one Being in the form of Hari-Hara, a common subject on the fresco walls.

Unique to Kerala murals is the *Panchamala* (five garlands) system, in which borders are decorated with relief-figures of animals, birds, flowers, vines and such: the *Bhoothamala* depicts goblins and dwarfs; *Mrugamala*, animals such as elephants and deer; *Pakshi-mala*, rows of parrot-like birds; *Vanamala*, floral motifs; and finally, the *Chithramala* is composed of decorative designs.

Kerala murals are also typified by their rich, warm and loud colors. A traditional Kerala mural strictly follows the *Pancha-varna* (five colors) scheme, using only red, yellow, green, black and white. In fact, it is this adherence to a limited earthy palette that gives the murals much of their distinctive look and feel.

White, yellow, black and red are the pure colors, according to *Shilparatna*. The other





DAS MENON/DINODIA



yellow, ocher red, white, bluish green and pure green are the more important colors.

All pigments are derived from natural materials, such as minerals and stones, oils, juices, roots and herbs. The yellow and red colors are mixed from minerals (arsenic sulfide and mercuric sulfide), green from the juice of a plant locally called Eravikkara, black from the soot of oil lamps. White, the base, is prepared with lime. Colors are mixed in a wooden bowl with tender coconut water and exudates from the neem tree. Other methods, minerals and herbs are occasionally used, but always natural.

The colors relate to the gunas, or attributes, of the subjects. For instance, green is employed for depicting the sattva (balanced, pure or divine) divinities; red and yellow for rajas (active, irascible) characters, and white for tamas (inert or base) events and creatures. The brushes used are of three types—flat,

medium and fine. Flat brushes are made from the hair found on the ears of calves, medium from the hair on a goat's belly and the fine brushes from delicate blades of grass.

#### Exacting Techniques

Mural artists are not merely illustrators but chemists as well, creating a complex concoction that will not only resist the erosion of the elements for hundreds of years. Mr. K. U. Krishnakumar, Principal of the Institute of Mural Painting in Guruvayoor, explains that the walls must be painstakingly prepared with a rough plastering of lime and sand mixed with the juice of kadukkai or of a vine called chunnambuvelli, all dissolved with palm sugar (jaggery). A smooth plaster—a similar mix with ground cotton added—is then applied. After ten days, 25 to 30 coats of quicklime and tender coconut water are

**Temple walls:** (left to right) Hanuman with His monkey battalion; Kerala royals on a big game hunt; Hari-Hara, half Siva and half Vishnu, is a popular mural image that promotes harmony among the sects; walls are elaborately filled with spiritual storytelling

applied, creating a thickness of about half an inch. Lemon juice is used to mellow the alkalinity of the surface. The mural is painted only after the wall is completely dry, using the fresco (Italian for fresh) technique of mural painting, which involves the rapid application of water-soluble pigments in a damp lime wash.

The art itself is defined in six stages, artist Muthukulam notes. *Lekhya karma* is the first, where sketching of the outlines is done in a light yellow color. Second comes the *rekha*

## Two Bold Contemporary Initiatives

On display at the Gandhi Smrithi Darshan gallery in New Delhi is perhaps the finest artistic exposition of Indian history and culture: an eight-part mural series on India's freedom struggle, created in



MADHU RAJ

2001 by Suresh Muthukulam and his team. Celebrating India's 50 years of independence, it focuses on eight moments from the life of Mahatma Gandhi, father of the nation. The main piece, measuring four by six meters, took six months to complete. Done in dry fresco, the perfect medium to immortalize Gandhi's nonviolent vision, the paintings will endure for 2000 years.

Adorning the Mannam Samadhi in Changanassery is a work completed in 2005 by

Suresh and team: the 'Saphalami-yathra' murals on the life of Man-nathu Padmanabhan, the late leader of Kerala's Nayar clan. Six artists worked for two years to capture eleven moments in this hero's life, revealing a man who dedicated all his life and wealth to unite his community, walking away from



**Life of a hero:** (left) Mr. G.S. Nair shows author G.K. Nair through the exhibit; (above) Padmanabhan receives the Padma Vibhushan award from President S. Radhakrishnan

luxury and leaving behind even his wristwatch, walking stick, pen and wooden shoes.

## Portrait of a Modern Master: Suresh Muthukulam



SURESH MUTHUKULAM

**Best of the best:** (clockwise from upper left) India's president greets the artist at an exhibition in New Delhi; Suresh in his studio, painting stylized palm trees; portrait of a creative powerhouse

When next you land at the new Mumbai airport, a massive 10' by 80' mural depicting flight will greet you, the work of S. Suresh Kumar, popularly known as Suresh Muthukulam. Traditionally trained and extraordinarily gifted, Suresh is arguably Kerala's leading muralist. His work can be found in hotel lobbies, museums and temples in 12 nations, and even at the HINDUISM TODAY offices in Hawaii. (Full disclosure: we have been working with him for four years and have no claim of objectivity in telling his story!)

Suresh was born in 1971 in a central Travancore hamlet called Muthukulam in the Alappuzha district of Kerala, the sixth and youngest child of K. Sukumaran and Pulamaja. His aptitude became evident from his childhood when he drew illustrations of the stories of *Bhagavatham* recited by his father. Encouraged by his teachers, he excelled in school art competitions. "When as a boy I visited the Krishnapuram Palace, which is not far from my ancestral home, I was attracted by the mural painting of Gajendra Moksham drawn on the wall adjacent to the bathing ghat in the palace pond. It inspired me a lot," Suresh told HINDUISM TODAY.

"Father soon took me to Mr. Varier who was teaching painting privately. I was led into a puja room inside the school where Ganapati was installed. To introduce me to art, Mr. Varier took a brush, sanctified it with some pujas and gave it to me with the order to draw

Ganapati riding a mouse. With the blessings of the Ganapati, I did it to the satisfaction of my first guru."

He fine-tuned his skills at a school in Mavelikara, took a three-year Diploma in Painting from the Modern Fine Arts at Mavelikara (1986-1989), then joined a five-year degree course (1989-1994) in the Kerala mural tradition under an innovative gurukula system started by the Guruvayur Devaswom. "There I was fortunate to apprentice under the late great Mammiyoor Krishnankutty Nair, a master of the tradition. Together we restored a mural painting at the Padmanabha Swami Temple in Thiruvananthapuram. It took us four years to complete and we stayed at the site happily, only receiving boarding and lodging for our work. To us it was pure, selfless art, and a great opportunity to perfect our skills."

Raw talent and hard work earned him accolades and commissions in India and abroad. In 1995 he became a visiting lecturer at the Ravi Varma Institute of Fine Arts. When the state set up the Vastu Vidya Gurukulam at Aranmula to teach vastu shastra and mural arts, Suresh was chosen to head the mural section. His students are thriving in the field. He senses the traditional arts are in revival, as people discover murals have more color, style and grace than modern works. He half jokes that "Modern art gives me the impression that it is done without bothering much with knowledge of the basics."

*karma* which enhances and gives dimension to the outlines. The third stage, called *varna karma*, breathes life into the subject with the addition of colors. In the fourth stage, *var-tana karma*, shading is added for depth and definition. *Lekha karma* is the tedious outlining of all forms, usually with black. The final stage is called *dvika karma*, where life is given to the eyes of the Deities and people, "awakening or stirring the work to life." This

is also called *samarpanam*, which means an offering from the artist. A fine coat of resin is then painted on the surface to give it a glossy look.

While the ancient procedures remain fairly intact, modern times have brought changes. To meet the demands of clients and for display at distant exhibitions, Kerala paintings are often executed these days on plywood, cloth, paper and canvas. But the old genius is

still evident in the work of Suresh Muthukulam and his students, in their renderings of modern Kerala village life, of contemporary Indian biographies and of the eternal Divinities. The old Kerala masters might be startled to see the murals in the lobby of the Mumbai Hyatt or on pillars in Delhi's Imperial Hotel; but even the most irascible of them would smile to know that his craft is alive and well in the 21st century.





## SACRED MUSIC

# Dhrupad Yoga — Singing to God

The Gundecha brothers carry forward an ancient musical yoga tradition of sacred song rooted in the Vedas that invokes God as Nada Brahma and awakens the soul

BY DR. K.K. CHAWLA, ALABAMA, USA

THERE IS LITTLE THAT CAN PREPARE ONE for the musical genius of the Gundecha brothers. They sit cross-legged on the stage in elegant, matching Indian outfits, framed by a pair of tamburas that rise from behind, their drummer by the side. The experience starts with quiet vocal ornaments, first from one and then the other, gentle liltings passed back and forth with exquisite subtlety. They are two, yet one, so attuned, so aware of the other. Hand and arm gestures, like graceful mudras, seem to summon the sounds from impossibly deep, athletically trained inner chambers. The opening complete, they take flight, soaring into a spiritual space that has them singing, now together, now alone, back and forth, carrying us on wings of astounding synchronicity and soul-stirring devotion. If that seems hyperbolic, simply sit in the presence of the Gundecha brothers (or hear them sing to God Siva on YouTube ([bit.ly/shivashiva](http://bit.ly/shivashiva))). If this be not sacred sound, it's as close as embodied beings will ever get. Where does this melodic magic have its source? In the ancient tradition called *dhrupad*.

Until about two centuries ago, *dhrupad*

was the main form of North Indian classical music. It was sung in temples from early times and later in royal courts. Some consider it India's oldest musical form. Its patrons were the kings of the Indian princely states; the name Raja Man Singh Tomar of Gwalior stands out as one such regal patrons.

In the first half of the 20th century, *dhrupad* was in danger of extinction. With the loss of royal patronage, it gradually gave way to a more free-form style called *khayal*. Around the 1940s, Hindu music shifted paradigms from being a form of worship and yoga to a performance/entertainment art. Few recordings of religious artists were made. By the late 90s most great geniuses of *dhrupad* and other schools of sacred music had passed on. A vast repertoire of Hindu music and the knowledge of the intricacies of the art went with them to their funeral pyres.

## Saving an Ancient Tradition

Fortunately, efforts by a few proponents from the Dagar family have led to the revival and popularization of *dhrupad* in India and in the West. The Dagers trace their brahminical lineage back twenty generations to the 16th century, to one Brij Chand of Daguri

village near Delhi (hence the name Dagar). But the grandsire of them all, everybody seems to agree, was Baba Gopal Das Pandey of Jaipur, who broke caste rules by accepting paan from Mohammad Shah Rangeel. Ostracized by his community, he converted to Islam. Thus, all the Dagers are the progeny of Pandey Brahmins.

The Dagers are credited with reviving *dhrupad* music with distinction. They are known for the deeply spiritual and meditative quality of their music. In particular, they have sparked a revival of the Dagarvani (sometimes spelled as Dagarbani) style of *dhrupad*. Their disciples, though few, are continuing the tradition. Today's leading exponents are the three Gundecha brothers, who are direct disciples of Ustad Zia Fariduddin Dagar and Ustad Zia Mohiuddin Dagar. Umakant and Ramakant Gundecha are the two vocalists; the third brother, Akhilesh, plays *pakhawaj*, the long drum.

A performance of two musicians together is called a *jugalbandi*. This art form was perfected by Moinuddin and Aminuddin Dagar, two brothers who changed the technique from a counterpoint to a harmonious blend of both voices. The Gundecha brothers



**Musical yogis and teachers:** (left) in a performance, the Gundecha brothers' minds are on God; (above) the Gundecha brothers committed to passing the tradition of sacred music on to the next generation. Here Umakant teaches at the Sansthan in Bhopal where students come from many nations.

ers are masters of *jugalbandi*. They sing with eyes usually closed, their voices exquisitely matched in tone and range. A listener cannot tell where one starts and the other leaves. The result is an incredibly spiritual and satisfying experience.

Continuing the age-old tradition of *guru-shishya* parampara, the brothers have set up a residential gurukul-type institution called Dhrupad Sansthan (Institute) in Bhopal, India. The basic philosophy is that true teaching cannot be achieved just through formal lectures, books, distance or online learning. Teaching has an important nonverbal component, learning by osmosis, transmission from the guru to the student when both live under the same roof. I visited the gurukul in December, 2011, met with the brothers and witnessed a public performance by them and their students. These students, some from overseas, undergo a rigorous and intensive training. They observe a vegetarian diet, get up at 5am every morning and go through a strict regimen throughout the day. It is an arduous, total immersion in *dhrupad* virtuosity.

## Rooted in the Vedas

Indian classical music traces its roots to the chanting of the Vedic hymns. The earliest Vedic

chanting used only three notes. Eventually this evolved into the present system of seven notes, points on a continuum of microtonal variations. The term used for classical music in Sanskrit is *shastriya sangeet*—music that is based on fundamental traditional principles found in the shastras. It is rooted in the spiritual concept of Nada Brahma, God (the Absolute) in the form of sound. The primordial sound, *Pranava*, is Om. So, *dhrupad* is a form of yoga—namely nada yoga, merging with the Divine through sound.

The word *dhrupad* is derived from *dhruva* and *pada*. *Dhruva* means “fixed.” For example, the pole star is called *dhruva tara*; its position in the night sky is fixed, while other stars move across the sky. *Pada* means a part, composition or a stanza. Thus, *dhrupad* translates as a fixed musical composition.

Many *dhrupad* performers make the point that they do not perform to entertain the audience; their singing is more a never-ending quest toward the Godhead.



**Rescuers of an ancient Hindu art:** The Dagar brothers, Moinuddin and Aminuddin, singing in Bombay in the 50s or early 60s. *Dhrupad* is a Hindu tradition, and most songs praise Hindu Deities. Many singers' families, patronized by Mogul rulers, were assimilated into Islam over time.

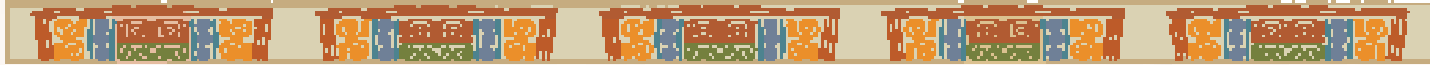
## Understanding Dhrupad

The Dagar school teaches that the artist must master nada yoga, which includes unfolding through the chakras, our spiritual force centers. In the *alap* (or improvisational, part of the singing), the attentive listener will notice that the sound, or nada, starts from the navel region and moves upward through the throat to the palate. *Dhrupad* singing requires intense practice and a mastery of nada yoga to produce a palette of sounds, like the palette of colors a painter uses to produce a painting.

Proficiency in nada yoga enables singers to produce vast combinations of notes and tones, by flowing the sound freely along the navel-to-head axis (the navel, heart, throat, lips, tongue, teeth and the head). This art comprises both *aadhar nada* (sound produced by vibration of vocal chords) and *niradhaar nada* (inner sound of the body developed by breathing). These two sub-sounds are produced in union. This elaborate cultivation of the *niradhaar nada* makes *dhrupad* unique among all of India's musical forms. The master of nada yoga uses these energy channels and plays his entire navel-to-head vocal instrument, called *gayatri veena*, to produce divine sound.

A person accustomed to Western classical music, where rhythm and harmonics are the main characteristics, should leave that baggage behind when listening to Indian classical music, especially *dhrupad*. Here the notes are not treated as fixed, discrete points, but as fluid entities with infinite microtonal shades, resulting in deep melodic nuances. My suggestion for anyone wanting to really experience *dhrupad* music is to sit





**Taking dhruwad to the world:** the Gundecha brothers (left to right) Akhilesh, Ramakant and Umakant perform in Toronto, Canada

ers are masters of jugalbandi. They sing with eyes usually closed, their voices exquisitely matched in tone and range. A listener cannot tell where one starts and the other leaves. The result is an incredibly spiritual and satisfying experience.

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**Ramakant (left) and Umakant (right) Gundecha:** with author Dr. Chawla and his wife. The brothers are easily approachable, regarding their fans as a *satsang* of devotees.



**Hindu American Foundation**  
Promoting understanding, tolerance and pluralism

## Let’s speak out on behalf of Hindus in distress

**Most of us are fortunate to live in a democracy that safeguards freedom of religion.** Imagine living without such protection. In Pakistan, Hindu parents wake up each morning fearing this could be the day their daughter does not return from school.

**www.HAFsite.org**

(202) 223-8222 | 910 17th Street NW, Suite 1180, Washington DC 20006 USA

Hindu minorities in Pakistan, Bangladesh, and other countries endure much discrimination and live in constant fear of violence, kidnapping, forced conversions, and terror.

HAF’s annual Hindu human rights report calls attention to the daily litany of abuses minority Hindu communities suffer around the world. In the U.S., it serves to inform Congress, human rights organizations, and embassy officials. *And it urges them to act.*

As Hindus who can freely voice our concerns, staying silent is not an option. It’s time to stand up and speak out. Visit our website to see the report, and support our efforts.





# Hindu Heritage Endowment

## DIGITAL DHARMA FUND HELPS SUSTAIN MONASTERY WEBSITES

“With so much misinformation, even disinformation, on Hinduism abounding, it is deeply important to have accurate online resources on Hinduism—as many as possible,” explains Gayatri Rajan of California, a regular visitor to websites of Kauai’s Hindu Monastery. The information is largely disorganized, lacking depth and authenticity. The Digital Dharma Endowment was created as a source of funding to provide for the monastery’s free, up-to-date, well-documented web resources, which guide contemporary Hinduism around the world, empower institutions following the Hindu tradition and clarify the faith to lay people, academics, journalists and politicians.

Gaurav Malhotra of Chicago shares, “We can’t think of a richer, more accurate resource to enhance and expand knowledge and understanding of our religion. Being parents of a young child, we find this extremely important.”

“We are reaching out during the last quarter of each year for donations that will help support the website,” explains Paramacharya Sadasivanathaswami, editor of HINDUISM TODAY, “and we follow the Wikipedia model for fund raising. Our first fund-raising drive, held in 2010, succeeded in raising \$60,000. The 2011 drive brought in \$64,000 to support our 2012 projects.”

This program, called the Digital Dharma Drive, gave 10 percent of its donations received during the first year to open the **Digital Dharma Endowment** (fund #85.) The fund was co-created by A.D. and K.D. Williams of Costa Mesa, California, who gave a contribution which brought the total to \$10,000, the minimal amount required to open a new fund. “We realized the funding of the Digital Dharma Endowment is the equivalent of sustaining the online electronic keys that unlock the portal of freedom, namely from samsara.” The endowment will continue to receive 10 percent of Digital Dharma Drive donations annually. The principal goal of the endowment is to keep free web resources available in an ever-expanding list of formats and to continue sharing this treasure of human knowledge without charging fees or cluttering the site with distracting advertising.

The monastery’s websites advocate, promote and perpetuate the Hindu heritage and the vision of its founder, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami (1927-2001), affectionately known as Gurudeva. A well-funded endowment can provide a steady income for generations to come. As Gurudeva emphasized, endowments also provide the means to contribute to the overall financial stability of an organization, thus protecting the future of Hinduism’s vast heritage. All donations to the endowment are tax deductible, and while tax deductibility may provide a business impetus to contribute, the more compelling reason to give is that the sites provide information on Sanatana Dharma that is complete, accessible and articulated without bias. Most importantly, the websites and the endowment serve a spiritual purpose, which far outweighs the tax benefits.

This sentiment was shared by Nandikesh Chandrashekhara of Washington: “The monastery’s websites explain Hinduism the way I need to see it—direct, authoritative and full of love.” Contributions to the endowment are managed with professional care. The annual grants of four percent of principal go directly to the enhancement of the websites and their content. Since the websites—those of Himalayan Academy, Hinduism Today and Hindu Heritage Endowment—are created and maintained by selfless monks, grants are not used to support staff salaries or administrative overhead.

The monks describe the Digital Dharma Drive and its endowment as a game-changing boon. “For years we struggled,” confides Paramacharya Sadasivanathaswami, “as many publication teams have lately, with how to keep our sites growing and improving while continuing to hold to our ideal of giving everything we produce for free online. Wikipedia gave us the model, and now we have the means, for the first time, to bring outside high-tech expertise into our plans and designs. It’s been amazingly empowering for us.” For more information, call or email the contacts below.



### HINDU HERITAGE ENDOWMENT

KAUAI’S HINDU MONASTERY, 107 Kaholalele Road, Kapaa, Hawaii, 96746-9304 USA  
808-822-3012 ext 244 • fax: 808-822-3152 • [hhe@hindu.org](mailto:hhe@hindu.org) • [www.hheonline.org](http://www.hheonline.org)

## APRIL TO JUNE ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>Kauai Aadheenam Monastic Endowment</b> |           |
| Rajkumar Alagesan                         | 30.00     |
| Anonymous                                 | 300.00    |
| Roshan Harilela                           | 375.00    |
| Gajanan Nataraj                           | 15.00     |
| Niraj Thaker                              | 51.00     |
| Other Donations                           | 60,000.00 |
| Total                                     | 60,771.00 |

### Iraivan Temple Endowment

|                                 |           |
|---------------------------------|-----------|
| Kiran Davane                    | 152.00    |
| Victoria Lynne Johnson          | 21.00     |
| Latha Kannan                    | 153.00    |
| Murali Krishnaswamy             | 500.00    |
| Anonymous                       | 108.00    |
| Sankara Skandanatha             | 120.00    |
| Pregassen & Selvina Soobramaney | 60.00     |
| Bob & Sunanda Teppara           | 116.00    |
| Niraj Thaker                    | 51.00     |
| Other Donations                 | 47,774.51 |
| Total                           | 49,055.51 |

### Kauai Aadheenam Annual Archana Fund

|                                  |          |
|----------------------------------|----------|
| Microsoft Matching Gifts Program | 100.00   |
| Anonymous                        | 447.00   |
| Anil Ananda Badhwar              | 9.00     |
| Derek Baker                      | 56.70    |
| Hemakhesha Naatha Batumallah     | 9.00     |
| Mekaladeva Batumallah            | 9.00     |
| Gunavadee Caremben               | 8.31     |
| Somasundaram Caremben            | 8.31     |
| Sukanta Caremben                 | 8.31     |
| Juggoo Chattrarund               | 1.59     |
| Jegadessa Chenganna              | 96.36    |
| S. Cogineni                      | 201.00   |
| Shailya Giri                     | 250.00   |
| Victoria Lynne Johnson           | 32.00    |
| JuhiVaasana Koothan              | 4.99     |
| Kishore Krishna                  | 100.00   |
| Anil Kumar                       | 18.00    |
| Maragatham Kumar                 | 200.00   |
| Beeharry Luxmiparasad            | 3.17     |
| Shakti Mahadevan                 | 143.00   |
| Siven Mooneesawmy                | 10.00    |
| Sivakavinian Moonesawmy          | 20.00    |
| Jogendra Moorooogen              | 3.40     |
| Vidyadevi Moorooogen             | 3.40     |
| Toshadevi Nataraja               | 60.00    |
| Subramaniam Pennathur            | 49.98    |
| Temav Ramchander                 | 3.17     |
| Swarna Reddy                     | 251.00   |
| Payal Sehgal                     | 100.00   |
| Hemavalli Sivalingam             | 2.88     |
| Komaldeva Sivananda              | 21.62    |
| Poobarlene Soobramanien          | 146.52   |
| R. Thanaleetchumi & Family       | 1.00     |
| Total                            | 2,378.71 |

### Hinduism Today Lifetime Subscription Fund

|                                  |           |
|----------------------------------|-----------|
| Rajni Bhai Acharya               | 499.00    |
| Rashmikant & Malini Antani       | 501.00    |
| Derek Baker                      | 234.17    |
| Connel Barnabas                  | 499.00    |
| Mans Broo                        | 499.00    |
| Umapathi R. & Geetha Cattamanchi | 499.00    |
| Mahesh & Bhavna Chhabria         | 299.00    |
| Ras Dharan                       | 499.00    |
| Nectan Jain                      | 299.00    |
| Bhramaramba Kanthamneni          | 299.00    |
| Souda Koothan                    | 67.80     |
| Bala Krishna                     | 114.93    |
| Velika Lawrence                  | 32.58     |
| Shakti Mahadevan                 | 57.00     |
| Thandar Maharajh                 | 499.00    |
| Bharat Makadia                   | 499.00    |
| Raj & Deepa Maturi               | 499.00    |
| Ananda Mootoorcupen              | 291.81    |
| Dayavati Murugan                 | 75.00     |
| Viswanathan Nagareajan           | 499.00    |
| Suresh Palanisami                | 299.00    |
| Harish L. Patel                  | 299.00    |
| Hemant and Bhavna Patel          | 299.00    |
| Rama Pemmaraju Rao               | 42.00     |
| Kirtideva Peruman                | 19.96     |
| Niroshnee Peruman                | 24.94     |
| Guru Prasadh                     | 299.00    |
| Indrani Rajendra                 | 499.00    |
| Kakarala J. Rao                  | 499.00    |
| Poobalan Roshan                  | 351.00    |
| Atul Roy                         | 299.00    |
| Rohini P. Sharma                 | 499.00    |
| Logavalli Sinsamy                | 34.01     |
| Devaladevi Sivaceyon             | 6.45      |
| Nutanaya Sivaceyon               | 6.45      |
| Patudeva Sivaceyon               | 6.45      |
| Potriyan Sivanathan              | 9.62      |
| Kevina Soobramanien              | 375.69    |
| Poobarlene Soobramanien          | 211.57    |
| M. Sridevi                       | 499.00    |
| Valli Subramanian                | 499.00    |
| Sivam U. Thillaikanthan          | 66.00     |
| Jitanshu Trivedi                 | 499.00    |
| Jayshree Kantilal Vadsola        | 299.00    |
| Sushma & Siva Velu               | 299.00    |
| Prabha S. Verma                  | 499.00    |
| Total                            | 13,502.43 |

|   |          |
|---|----------|
| <b>Gurudeva's Trilogy Distribution Fund</b> |          |
| Jothi Kotta                                 | 5,000.00 |
| Vel Mahalingum                              | 13.61    |
| Manogaran Mardemootoo                       | 34.01    |
| Janaka Param                                | 105.00   |
| Total                                       | 5,152.62 |

### Kailasa Peedam Gift Fund

|                 |      |
|-----------------|------|
| Gajanan Nataraj | 5.00 |
|-----------------|------|

### Kauai Aadheenam Mathavasi Medical Fund

|                       |          |
|-----------------------|----------|
| Kulagan Moonesawmy    | 19.96    |
| Carmen Debora Murbach | 450.00   |
| Gowri Nadason         | 172.93   |
| Toshadevi Nataraja    | 60.00    |
| Aran Sambandar        | 162.00   |
| Barathy Sockanathan   | 31.91    |
| Vayudeva Varadan      | 54.00    |
| Other Donations       | 4,800.00 |
| Total                 | 5,750.80 |

### Tirunavukkarasu Nayanar Gurukulam

|           |        |
|-----------|--------|
| Anonymous | 854.18 |
|-----------|--------|

### Kauai Aadheenam Renovation Endowment

|               |        |
|---------------|--------|
| Rajendra Giri | 110.00 |
|---------------|--------|

### Sri Subramuniya Ashram Scholarship Fund

|                |        |
|----------------|--------|
| Rajendra Giri  | 110.00 |
| Bala Sivaceyon | 11.29  |
| Total          | 121.29 |

### Sri Subramuniya Kottam Fund

|           |        |
|-----------|--------|
| Anonymous | 900.00 |
|-----------|--------|

### Kumbhalavalai Ganesha Temple Endowment

|                     |       |
|---------------------|-------|
| Mano Navaratnarajah | 75.00 |
|---------------------|-------|

### Thekkumbadam Vettakorumakan Temple Trust

|             |           |
|-------------|-----------|
| Susila Nair | 10,000.00 |
|-------------|-----------|

### Hinduism Today Production Fund

|                       |          |
|-----------------------|----------|
| P.C. Ghosh            | 90.00    |
| Hiranya Gowda         | 31.00    |
| Rajagopal Krishnan    | 20.00    |
| Sakuntalai Krishnan   | 30.05    |
| Subramaniam Pennathur | 50.01    |
| Sakuntalai Periasamy  | 17.22    |
| Anonymous             | 1,128.00 |
| Aran Sambandar        | 108.00   |
| Murari Singh          | 100.00   |
| Ganga Sivanathan      | 344.00   |
| Total                 | 1,918.28 |

### Hindu Orphanage Endowment Fund

|                        |          |
|------------------------|----------|
| Roshan Harilela        | 375.00   |
| Murali Krishnaswamy    | 250.00   |
| Alex Ruberto           | 50.00    |
| Gouri Shanker          | 11.00    |
| Rodney & Ilene Standen | 30.00    |
| Niraj Thaker           | 51.00    |
| Himanshu Vyas          | 108.00   |
| Matthew Wiczork        | 25.00    |
| Anonymous              | 554.18   |
| Total                  | 1,454.18 |

### Hindu Education Endowment

|                          |        |
|--------------------------|--------|
| Murali Balaji            | 250.00 |
| Hasu N. & Hansa H. Patel | 100.00 |
| Total                    | 350.00 |

### Hindu Press International Endowment Fund

|               |       |
|---------------|-------|
| Hiranya Gowda | 21.00 |
|---------------|-------|

### Loving Ganesha Distribution Fund

|                     |          |
|---------------------|----------|
| Mano Navaratnarajah | 225.00   |
| Gassa Patten        | 900.00   |
| Total               | 1,125.00 |

### Saiva Agamas Trust

|                  |        |
|------------------|--------|
| Ganga Sivanathan | 140.00 |
|------------------|--------|

### Spiritual Park of Mauritius Endowment

|            |       |
|------------|-------|
| Anil Kumar | 18.00 |
|------------|-------|

### Hindu Heritage Endowment Administrative Fund

|                        |        |
|------------------------|--------|
| GE United Way Campaign | 66.91  |
| Anonymous              | 186.65 |
| Total                  | 253.56 |

### Kauai Aadheenam Religious Art and Artifacts Fund

|                    |       |
|--------------------|-------|
| Rajadeva Alahan    | 51.00 |
| Michael Zimmermann | 7.00  |
| Total              | 58.00 |

### A. Saravanapavan Family Murugan Temple Pillaiyar Shrine Fund

|                        |        |
|------------------------|--------|
| Pathmini Saravanapavan | 100.00 |
|------------------------|--------|

### Thank You Bodhinatha Fund

|                             |          |
|-----------------------------|----------|
| Alex Ruberto                | 30.00    |
| Amarnath & Latha Devarmanai | 324.00   |
| Anand Subra                 | 25.00    |
| Anba Dayananden Valayten    | 8.57     |
| Anonymous                   | 2,651.12 |

|                     |          |
|---------------------|----------|
| Aran Sambandar      | 162.00   |
| Aran Sendan         | 108.00   |
| Arjun Pennathur     | 499.00   |
| Chellappa Deva      | 51.00    |
| Deva Seyon          | 108.00   |
| Dmitry Borzunov     | 100.00   |
| Eesan Sankara       | 20.00    |
| Ganesh Kumar        | 216.00   |
| Gaurav Malhotra     | 251.00   |
| Hitesvara Saravan   | 108.00   |
| Hotranatha Ajaya    | 33.00    |
| Indivar Sivanathan  | 51.00    |
| Janaka Param        | 108.00   |
| Mano Navaratnarajah | 150.00   |
| Michael Wasyliw     | 648.00   |
| Mihir Meghani       | 499.00   |
| Mrunal Patel        | 501.00   |
| Natraj Narayanswami | 11.00    |
| Raja Vishnu         | 130.00   |
| Vayudeva Varadan    | 63.00    |
| Vel Alahan          | 108.00   |
| Total               | 6,963.69 |

### Udayan Care Endowment Fund

|           |        |
|-----------|--------|
| Anonymous | 554.18 |
|-----------|--------|

### Saivite Hindu Scriptural Fund for the Visually Impaired

|              |       |
|--------------|-------|
| Alex Ruberto | 40.00 |
|--------------|-------|

### Sri Chandra Madhab Debnath Endowment

|                         |        |
|-------------------------|--------|
| Shyamal Chandra Debnath | 150.00 |
|-------------------------|--------|

### Murugan Temple Yalpanam Festival Fund

|                        |        |
|------------------------|--------|
| Pathmini Saravanapavan | 150.00 |
|------------------------|--------|

### Manitha Neyam Trust Fund

|                |       |
|----------------|-------|
| Bala Sivaceyon | 12.90 |
|----------------|-------|

### Kapaleeshwara Temple Orphanage

|                                  |        |
|----------------------------------|--------|
| Microsoft Matching Gifts Program | 100.00 |
| Kishore Krishna                  | 100.00 |
| Murali Krishnaswamy              | 250.00 |
| Karthik Ramanathan               | 100.00 |
| Michael Zimmermann               | 9.00   |
| Total                            | 559.00 |

### Manjung Hindu Sabha Orphanage Fund

|           |        |
|-----------|--------|
| Anonymous | 654.18 |
|-----------|--------|

### Pazhassi Balamandiram Orphanage Fund

|                     |        |
|---------------------|--------|
| Chiranjeevi Raparla | 100.00 |
| Anonymous           | 554.18 |
| Total               | 654.18 |

### Swami Vipulananta Children's Home Endowment

|           |        |
|-----------|--------|
| Anonymous | 854.18 |
|-----------|--------|

### Hindu Literature Fund

|               |        |
|---------------|--------|
| Rajendra Giri | 110.00 |
|---------------|--------|

### Hinduism Today Complimentary Subscription Fund

|                    |       |
|--------------------|-------|
| Hiranya Gowda      | 51.00 |
| Rajagopal Krishnan | 20.00 |
| Michael Zimmermann | 9.00  |
| Total              | 80.00 |

### Kauai Aadheenam Yagam Fund

|                        |      |
|------------------------|------|
| Victoria Lynne Johnson | 6.00 |
|------------------------|------|

### Yogaswami Hindu Girls' Home of Sittandy Endowment

|                             |          |
|-----------------------------|----------|
| Jeri Arin                   | 300.00   |
| Marlene Carter              | 162.00   |
| Maruthu Pandian Darmalingam | 60.00    |
| Julia M. Hall               | 108.00   |
| Natraj Narayanswami         | 11.00    |
| Padmaja Patel               | 150.00   |
| Subramaniam Pennathur       | 50.01    |
| Ravichandran Ravichandran   | 42.00    |
| Ganga Sivanathan            | 100.00   |
| Sivaruban Sivanesan         | 150.00   |
| Andrew Stich                | 300.00   |
| Soma Sundaram               | 20.00    |
| Anonymous                   | 954.18   |
| Total                       | 2,407.19 |

### Yogaswami Hindu Boys' Home Fund

|                             |          |
|-----------------------------|----------|
| Maruthu Pandian Darmalingam | 60.00    |
| Sasikumar Darmalingam       | 15.00    |
| Canaganayagam Kugendra      | 40.00    |
| Natraj Narayanswami         | 21.00    |
| Ananthakumar Renganathan    | 300.00   |
| Kanthasamy Selvakumar       | 100.00   |
| Anonymous                   | 1,170.18 |
| Total                       | 1,706.18 |

### Maha Ganapati Temple of Arizona Endowment

|                                  |        |
|----------------------------------|--------|
| Chowdary & Radhikadevi Koripella | 116.00 |
|----------------------------------|--------|

### India Hindu Tribals Endowment

|              |       |
|--------------|-------|
| Niraj Thaker | 10.00 |
|--------------|-------|

|  |        |
|--|--------|
| <b>Murugan Temple of North America Puja Fund</b> |        |
| Pathmini Saravanapavan                           | 50.00  |
| Vayudeva Varadan                                 | 54.00  |
| Total  | 104.00 |

### Ramanathaswamy Temple Cleaning Fund

|                                  |        |
|----------------------------------|--------|
| Microsoft Matching Gifts Program | 100.00 |
| Hiranya Gowda                    | 33.00  |
| Kishore Krishna                  | 100.00 |
| Manogaran Mardemootoo            | 68.03  |
| Kulagan Moonesawmy               | 19.96  |
| Toshadevi Nataraja               | 60.00  |
| Ganga Sivanathan                 | 300.00 |
| Niraj Thaker                     | 22.00  |
| Total                            | 702.99 |

### Hindu American Foundation Endowment

|               |       |
|---------------|-------|
| Tommy Stinson | 20.00 |
| Niraj Thaker  | 22.00 |
| Total         | 42.00 |

### Cows of Kadavul and Iraivan Temples (Kovil Maadu) Endowment

|                     |        |
|---------------------|--------|
| Melinda Moore       | 10.00  |
| Natraj Narayanswami | 22.00  |
| Toshadevi Nataraja  | 30.00  |
| Niraj Thaker        | 11.00  |
| Anonymous           | 183.36 |
| Total               | 256.36 |

### Jaffna Kannathidhy Kali Kovil Endowment

|           |        |
|-----------|--------|
| Anonymous | 108.36 |
|-----------|--------|

### Hindu Association of West Texas Endowment

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| Hindu Association of West Texas Devotees | 30,000.00 |
|--|-----------|

### Pakistan Hindu Empowerment Fund

|                     |       |
|---------------------|-------|
| Anil Ananda Badhwar | 9.00  |
| Anil Kumar          | 18.00 |
| Total               | 27.00 |

### Bharathi Yoga Dhama Fund

|                        |       |
|------------------------|-------|
| Indra Praveen Vardelly | 11.00 |
|------------------------|-------|

### Panchangam Endowment Fund

|                             |          |
|-----------------------------|----------|
| Anonymous                   | 27.00    |
| Vel Alahan                  | 25.00    |
| Nina Anand                  | 25.00    |
| Dharmenderrao Apparasu      | 25.00    |
| Dolly N Belas               | 10.00    |
| John Bent                   | 25.00    |
| Christopher Brooking        | 25.00    |
| Sarah L. Caldwell           | 25.00    |
| Jennifer Cooper             | 25.00    |
| Paul DeSantis               | 27.00    |
| Douglas Donnell             | 25.00    |
| Narayan V. Dravid           | 25.00    |
| Ravindra Gudimella          | 25.00    |
| Subramanian Jaganathan      | 25.00    |
| Sankaran Jayanarayanan      | 25.00    |
| Anusha Karnagantan          | 19.50    |
| Ramesh Kasavaraju           | 25.00    |
| Vijay Kumar Krishnamoorthy  | 25.00    |
| Narinderkoemar Kuldip Singh | 5.00     |
| Gregg Lien                  | 108.00   |
| Carolyn Lo                  | 101.00   |
| Kolanthan Noganaden         | 25.00    |
| Kannan Padmanabhan          | 25.00    |
| Vish Padmanabhan            | 50.00    |
| Gerald Penn                 | 25.00    |
| Arun Ramakrishnan           | 25.00    |
| Ramalingam Ratnasabapathy   | 25.00    |
| Ravichandran Salem          | 25.00    |
| Aran Sambandar              | 54.00    |
| Bharathwaj Sankaran         | 25.00    |
| Mabel Schenone              | 25.00    |
| Sujatha Sitaraman           | 25.00    |
| Gowri Sriraman              | 27.00    |
| George Stefas               | 1.00     |
| Ragu Suppiah                | 10.00    |
| Udayakumar Thoota           | 30.00    |
| Forest Truman               | 25.00    |
| Henny Van Immerzeel         | 30.00    |
| Sriram Viswanathan          | 25.00    |
| Karen Yang                  | 79.00    |
| Total                       | 1,203.50 |



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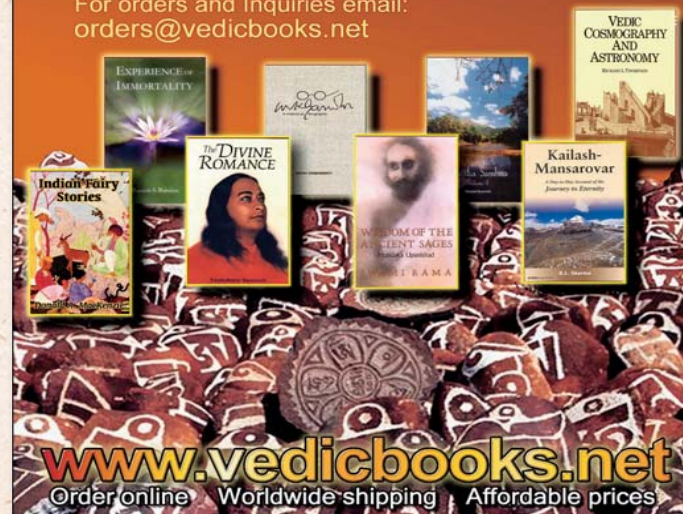
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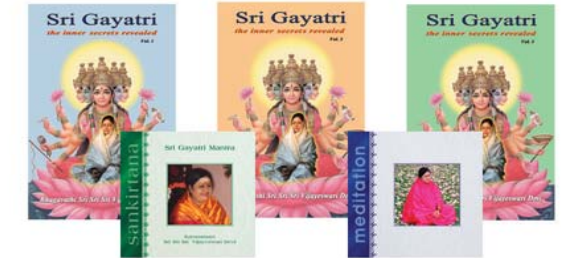
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Like an orphan,  
His hair in curls,  
Eyes soft and sad,  
He sat upon the rock,  
All alone,  
In the wilderness  
Of Gomukh.

Watching the glacier  
Turn bluish green  
And shatter  
Into the waters  
Of the Ganges—  
Longing for the silence of the skies,  
Silence of the mountain peaks,  
Silence within.

But the firmament flashed  
The Marks of Zorro,  
The skies rumbled in thunder,  
And his heart heaved  
Like the restless waves of the ocean.

But silent and still as a stone, he sat,  
Like a Rishi in tapas  
At Tapavan above the glacier.

In a moment  
A snow storm engulfed him.  
He became the glacier,  
The thunder,  
The lightning.

Thunder could not hear thunder;  
Lightning could not see lightning;  
Self could not feel self.

He became  
The Silence  
He longed for.

*The Silence of Thunder* by Dr., Arjunan Subramaniam  
15 March, 2012, Desa Park City, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

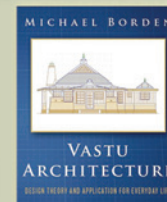
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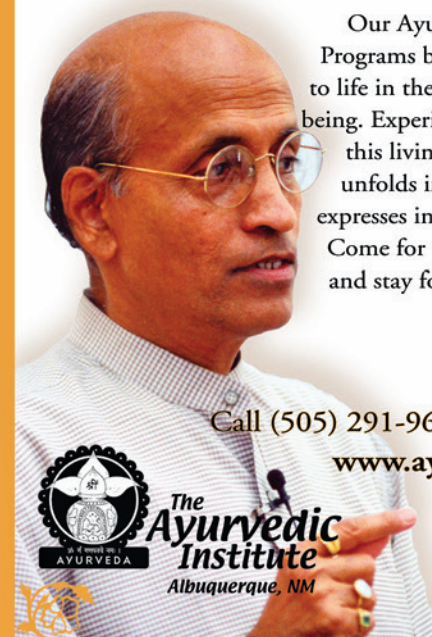
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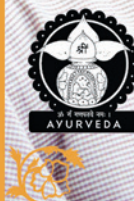
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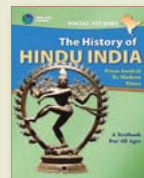
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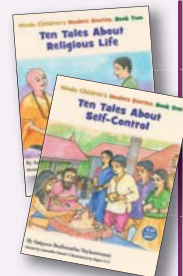
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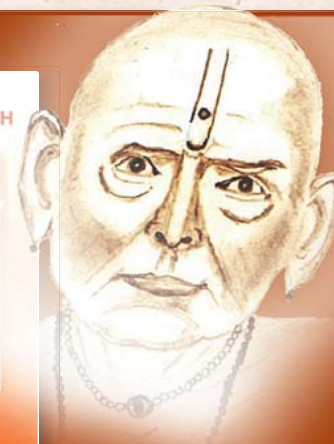
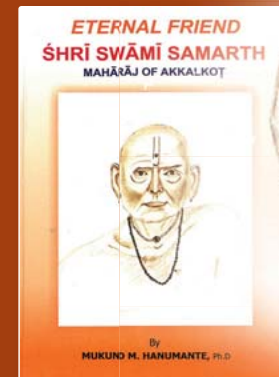
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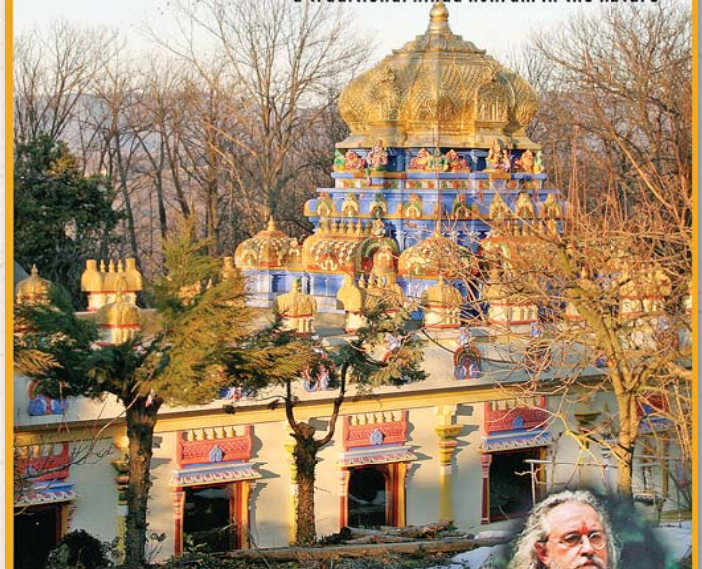
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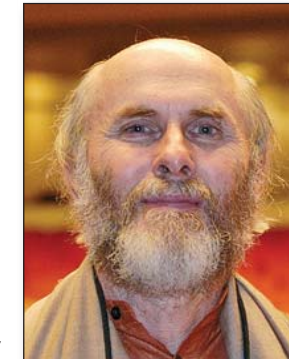
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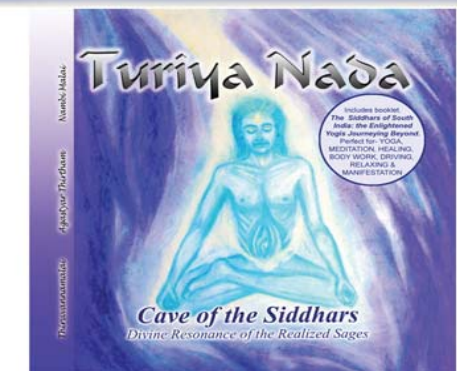
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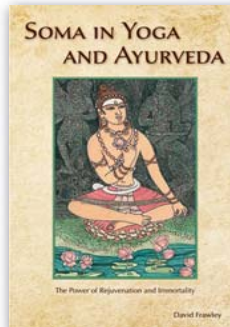
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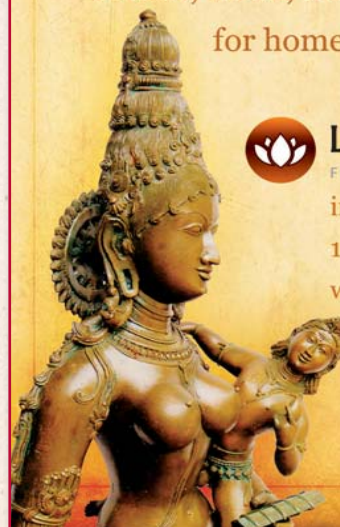
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## India's Awesome Virtual Reality Panoramas and Temple Videos

BY MADHURI SHEKHAR, LOS ANGELES

TODAY, MORE THAN EVER, IT IS POSSIBLE to explore the grand wonders of Indian temples from the comfort of your own home, through the many online virtual tours. For Hindus around the world, these virtual tours allow for the next best thing to a physical darshan of your favorite temple.

Some of the most popular and impressive are found on the Tamil Nadu Tourism website, [tamilnadutourism.org/virtualtour/](http://tamilnadutourism.org/virtualtour/), which has over 100 tours in 46 different locations, covering the state's natural wonders and many temples. Get ready for some breathtaking, immersive, 3d virtual adventures including the "Athens of India:" Madurai Meenakshi Amman temple, and the Thanjavur Brihadeeshwara temple. The Madurai tour alone has 31 interconnected 360° panoramas (each white point on the layout diagram is another area.) These panoramas were produced by View360, which has others on their web site ([www.view360.in](http://www.view360.in)), including a tour of Ajanta caves [www.view360.in/ajanta/](http://www.view360.in/ajanta/) and the Vandalur Zoo. See the Guruvayur temple at [www.360cities.net/image/guruvayoor-temple](http://www.360cities.net/image/guruvayoor-temple). Spectacular panoramas of the Padmanabhaswamy Temple and other Kerala and Sri Lanka sites can be found at [www.p4panorama.com](http://www.p4panorama.com).



### How Does it Work?

Panoramas are made of sets of photos taken by a camera with a special tripod mount that puts the lens directly over the center of the tripod. Multiple shots are taken going around in a circle. Special lenses capture the field of vision both overhead and below. Later, panorama software seamlessly stitches the photos them together.

**A tour of Meenakshi Temple:** (clockwise from top) the interior prakaram (hall-way) that surround the temple tank. Scroll up and you can look at the ceiling art. Put your self directly behind the gold flag pole facing the main sanctum. As you move around, when you see a small red arrow, click to go to the next scene.

